

YOU CAN CONNECT TO GOD STARTING TODAY:
A SPIRITUALITY FOR THE 21st CENTURY

A Practical Research Project
presented to
the Faculty of
Claremont School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Glen A. VanderKloot

May 2022



This professional project completed by

GLEN A VANDERKLOOT

has been presented to and accepted by
the Faculty of the Claremont School of Theology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Faculty Committee

Dr. Nicholas Grier Chairperson

Dr. Jack Jackson

Dr. Karen Dalton

Dean of the Faculty

Rev. Dr. Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook

May 2022

ABSTRACT

YOU CAN CONNECT TO GOD STARTING TODAY: A SPIRITUALITY FOR THE 21st CENTURY

by

Glen A. VanderKloot

Claremont School of Theology

2022

This paper begins with the ministry need that in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and other primarily Caucasian American mainline denominations, a significant number of members and clergy lack the awareness, understanding and ability to connect with God and become more intimate with God, yet have a deep hunger and thirst to do so. It will present some examples and studies that seem to give credence to this argument.

It explores the underlying factors that led to this situation and offers a response – a simple to use seven-chapter book and leader’s guide on various types and examples of spiritualities.

It also postulates that spiritualities vary from person to person and therefore there is no one-size-fits-all spirituality. Our spiritual life is enhanced when we discover the ways that work best for us to connect with God and then utilize those modes on a regular basis. Spirituality transforms knowledge about God into experiencing God.

This project and paper express my conviction that indeed God is still speaking today and therefore, it is important that we assist people, individually and collectively, to be discerning of God’s Spirit and direction for their lives and mission.

The primary goal of this project is to enable and empower others regularly to experience both the presence of God and intimacy with God as they recognize their desire to draw close to God, act on that desire using spiritual practices, and listen for and to the Spirit's nudges leading them to love and serve God and humanity. The secondary goal is to make available to pastors, deacons and leaders a resource they can use to teach spirituality to others.

I strive to place the Divine before me always.¹

An Ancient Jewish Prayer of Contemplation

And

An Unspoken Life Goal.

¹ Psalm 16:8, paraphrase.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Abstract	iv
Table of Contents	vii
Introduction: The Ministry Need and a Response	1
The Ministry Need of this Project	1
Primary and Secondary Goals	2
A Response	3
Spirituality Defined	4
Audience	7
Field Testing	8
Measuring	8
Overview of Chapters	9
Chapter 1 Identifying the Factors that Led to this Ministry Need, Quantitative Data, and Exceptions	12
Seminaries	12
Congregations as Unsafe Communities for Spiritual Conversations	15
Pastors	16
Failure to Connect Spirituality and Service	17
Lack of Exposure to Spiritual Practices	19
Culture	20
Leadership	22
Priorities	24
Work Ethic	24
Quantitative Data	25
Notable Exceptions	26
Chapter 2 Theological and Biblical Foundations	32
Definition of Spirituality	32
God's Desire:	
God Desires Us to Draw Close to God	33

Our Desire:	
Comes from God	34
Our Hunger and Thirst for Something More	35
What is Spirituality Seeking?	35
Seeking Intimacy with God	36
God's Action:	
God Invites Us to Come	38
Our Actions:	
Listening Is a Key Part Of Experiencing God	38
Seeking an Awareness of God's Presence	40
God's Interactions:	
Revelation Continues	45
God Answers Prayer	47
Our Interaction:	
Communicating with the Divine	48
Spirituality Is Active, Experiential and Unique	48
God's Love:	
God's Love Is Limitless	48
Our Love:	
We Love God with Our Whole Being and We Love Others	49
Spirituality Centers on God	50
We Live in God's Presence	51
One Bright Light of Hope	56
Chapter 3 Project Overview: Nuts and Bolts of My Project	
and the 14 Participants	59
Pre-Covid Plans	59
Covid Changes	59
Book Chapter Summaries	60
Permissions Sought and Received	62
Measurement Tools	63
Participants' Demographics	66

Narrative about the Group Demographics	68
Information on Each Participant	69
Information on the Writer/Researcher	74
Chapter 4 Findings and Results	76
Background	76
Results of the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale: Quantitative Data	76
Results of the Interviews and Comments: Qualitative Data	79
Chapter 5 Summary of Progress on the Goals, Potential Next Steps and Conclusions	84
The Primary Goal and Results	84
The Secondary Goal and Results	85
Potential Next Steps	85
Conclusions	85
Appendices	
Appendix A: Frequency of Meditation by Religious Groups	87
Appendix B: The Decline of the Mainline Churches 2000 to 2016	88
Appendix C: Invitation Flyer/Mailer	89
Appendix D: Consent Letter	90
Appendix E: Daily Spiritual Experience Scale	93
Appendix F: Pre-class Interview Questions	94
Appendix G: Post-Class Interview Questions	95
Appendix H: Small Group Book:	96
<i>You Can Connect with God Starting Today</i>	
Appendix I: Small Group Book Bibliography	278
Appendix J: Small Group Leader's Guide	286
Final Project Bibliography	301

Introduction: The Ministry Need and a Response

The Ministry Need of this Project

The first ministry need of this project and paper is that in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and other primarily Caucasian American mainline denominations, a significant number of members and clergy lack the awareness, understanding and ability to connect with God and become more intimate with God, yet have a deep hunger and thirst to do so.

This was amplified for me one Sunday morning at Faith Lutheran Church in Springfield, IL, when Claire came out of worship and said to me . . . “I’ve been coming to this church as an adult for over 20 years. I’ve heard dozens of times from multiple pastors that everyone should have a daily quiet time with God. But never once did anyone tell or show me how.” That was a fair criticism and it changed me, my preaching, and my teaching. I realized I had taught and preached the ‘why’ and the ‘what’ of spending time with God, but not the ‘how.’ I had often told my congregation to be aware of God’s presence without ever telling them ‘how’ to become aware of that divine presence. It is essential that pastors teach how we might recognize God’s presence and reflect on our experiences of God’s presence.

The second ministry need concurs with Gary Thomas in *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul’s Path to God* that spiritualities vary from person to person and therefore there is no one-size-fits-all spirituality.²

The corollary that follows those two ministry needs is that our spiritual lives are enhanced when we discover what are the pathways that work best for us and then utilize those approaches to God on a regular basis. I believe from personal experience and the testimony of

² Gary Thomas, *The Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul’s Path to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996). He makes this argument throughout the book.

others that indeed God is still speaking today. Therefore, it is important that we assist people, individually and collectively, to be discerning of God's Spirit and direction for their lives and mission.

I write this from a Lutheran Christian perspective. So when I use the term 'God,' I am referring to the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This God loves the world so much that he sent his son, Jesus, to save the world through his life, death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit calls us to faith. God is not an angry judge, but a loving father. God wants the best for us, "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not harm, to give you a future with hope."³

God desires that we "Love God with all our heart, soul, and mind and love our neighbor as ourselves."⁴ Who is our neighbor? Anyone in need. Therefore, racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia are inconsistent with Christians ethics. God does not favor any country, or race, or ethnic group. God loves all people and expects his followers to also love all. Since God even calls us to love our neighbor, there is no room for hate.

It is also true that when I refer to church, I mean Christian congregations or denominations. The book portion of this project utilizes practices from multiple faith traditions. While some are uniquely Christian, many of the practices are applicable to people outside of Christianity. These practices can easily be adapted by simply replacing the terms such as 'Father,' 'God' or 'Jesus' with 'God,' 'the Divine,' 'Holy One,' or even 'Higher Power.'

The Goals of this Project

The primary goal of this project is to enable and empower others regularly to experience both the presence of God and intimacy with God as they recognize their desire to draw close to

³ Jeremiah 29:11 (NRSV).

⁴ Matthew 22:37-39, paraphrase.

God, act on that desire using spiritual practices, listen for and to the Spirit's nudges, and are led to love and serve God and humanity. The secondary goal is to make available to pastors, deacons, and leaders a resource they can use to teach spirituality to others.

Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer in *Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders*, quote one of their colleagues, George Telford, of the Presbyterian Church USA, regarding this desire and hunger for a more vibrant faith based on spiritual practices.

Telford says . . .

There is an evident yearning among Presbyterians for a life of faith which is newer, fresher, more vibrant. People are hungry and thirsty – aware that in our churches, our religious life, and certainty in our personal lives, there is an emptiness and brokenness. There is underway a search for an authentic piety for our time. . . The desire and need are there and the people are ready.⁵

My personal experience causes me to believe that is particularly true for ELCA Lutherans as well as other Caucasian mainline Christians. Johnson and Dreitcer go on to say that people “. . . are ready to seek again a recovery of formative Christian disciplines, biblically rooted, focused on Bible study, prayer, reflection on the context of their discipleship. . .”⁶

A Response

My project and my response to this problem was developing and field testing a book that can stand alone, or function as a six-week adult small group study book and leaders' guide, to help participants discover a spirituality that works for them to connect with God on a regular basis. This resource, *You Can Connect with God – Starting Today: A Spirituality for the 21st Century*, introduces participants to multiple ways and practices to connect with God. This small group study gives each participant an opportunity to experience these practices and empower

⁵ George Telford, *Monday Morning*, June 1991, 19, quoted in Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer, *Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), loc. 43, Nook.

⁶ Johnson and Dreitcer, *Beyond the Ordinary*, loc. 43.

them to satisfy their spiritual hunger. It is also a resource that one can turn back to over and over when searching for additional practices to connect with the divine.⁷

Spirituality Defined

There are hundreds of different spiritual practices that we can use to make this connection with God. This project explores how to make connection with God through a few dozen of those methods. The essence of this connection is becoming more intimate with God and experiencing the presence of God. There is no one agreed upon definition of spirituality. The use of the word ‘spirituality’ is often vague and at times hard to define, but it does not need to be. My personal working definition of spirituality is . . .

***Spirituality is our desire, put into action, to interact with the divine
and then to live our lives loving God and neighbor.***

I developed this definition after looking at more than 15 ways various writers define or use the term spirituality. This definition includes ideas that other definitions incorporate. It is based on four essential actions in our connecting with the divine. This definition is based on four parts:

1. Our desire and longing for the Divine,
2. Our action to become aware of the divine (prayer, silence, meditation, contemplation, writing, painting, singing, serving, working for justice, communing with nature, etc.) that we take to make connection with God,
3. Our dialogue with God, and
4. Our renewed love for God and neighbor expressed in concrete action.

This definition has some similarities to the ideas of “The Body Prayer” by Julian of Norwich which has four movements: await, allow, accept, attend.

Many writers do not include part 4 in their definition of spirituality, but I believe it is essential because our spirituality should produce a benefit not just for ourselves. but also for

⁷ A copy of *You Can Connect with God – Starting Today: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* is included in Appendix H. It is not meant for distribution.

others. Jesus assumes his followers will feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, visit the imprisoned, and care for the sick⁸ as the fruit of abiding in Jesus.⁹ When we champion communing with God and ignore social action, or champion social action and ignore communing with God we end up with a fragmented spirituality. We need to develop a holistic, integrated spirituality that involves both our inner life and love and care of our neighbor.

Almeda Wright captures this vision of an integrated spirituality in *The Spiritual Lives of Young African Americans* by writing, “. . .youth will be empowered both by a personal relationship with Christ and be compelled by this relationship to see and respond to systemic and communal injustices.”¹⁰ Of course, this is equally true for adults. Timothy Murphy illustrates this holistic spirituality in *Sustaining Hope in an Unjust World*, “. . . faithfulness does not begin and end with what we feel in our hearts. It is also about engaging in the transformation of the world.”¹¹ Our spirituality should positively affect others. Dr. Nicholas Grier says in *Care for the Mental and Spiritual Health of Black Men: Hope to Keep Going*, “I believe that spirituality should also improve relationships and is, therefore, concerned with the well-being of all the people in the global community.”¹²

My seminary training did not include the teaching of how to develop the habit of utilizing spiritual practices. At that time, 1971-1974, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) proudly stressed that they were producing “theologians in residence in congregations.” I had absolutely no seminary training in spiritual practices until I began this Doctor of Ministry

⁸ Matthew 25:31-46, paraphrase.

⁹ John 15:4-5, paraphrase.

¹⁰ Almeda Wright, *The Spiritual Lives of Young African Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5.

¹¹ Timothy Charles Murphy, *Sustaining Hope in an Unjust World* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2019), 9.

¹² Nicholas Grier, *Care for the Mental and Spiritual Health of Black Men: Hope to Keep Going* (New York: Lexington Books, 2020), 97, Kindle.

program. This is not unique to LSTC. Mark Yaconelli in *Growing Souls: Experiments in Contemplative Youth Ministry* says, “Sadly, most seminaries are not prepared to help students develop a prayer life.”¹³ I had observed the ‘how’ in my parents and in some of my friends. But I mainly learned the ‘how’ from personal exploration, study and associating with people who, in a very good way, wear their spirituality on their sleeves. It is there in the open for everyone to see, learn, and copy. Then it became a quest to discover through testing of various spiritualities what worked for me.

Spirituality is unique to each individual. I believe that each person needs to discover 2-7 practices that work well for them, develop those practices, and exercise them regularly. There is nothing magical about that range. People need more than one practice, yet not too many, because we need different practices in different situations and at different times and stages of our lives. Using a variety of practices also can prevent us from both falling into a rut using the same practices day after day and getting bored with them.

It has become apparent to me, both anecdotally and from studies by Pew Research concerning the frequency of meditation among both religious groups and then Mainline Protestants,¹⁴ and from Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI)¹⁵ that pastors, deacons, and church leaders need to be very intentional in teaching and modeling for others the ‘how’ of

¹³ Mark Yaconelli, *Growing Souls: Experiments in Contemplative Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 10.

¹⁴ “Frequency of meditation by religious groups (2014),” Pew Research Center, accessed Apr. 15, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/compare/frequency-of-meditation/by/religious-tradition/>. Their research showed the ELCA was at the very bottom with only 32% of members practicing weekly meditation. See Appendix A.

¹⁵ Art Raney, Daniel Cox, and Robert P. Jones, “Searching for Spirituality in the U.S.: A New Look at the Spiritual but Not Religious,” PRRI, Nov. 6, 2017, www.prii.org/research/religiosity-and-spirituality-in-america/. Their research determined that 59 percent of those who self-identify as white mainline Christians do not consider themselves to be spiritual.

spirituality. Unfortunately, they themselves are often not comfortable enough with their own spirituality to teach others.

In my experience of 47 years of ordained ministry in the ELCA, serving five churches in different contexts in Illinois (rural, small town, medium-sized town and large metropolitan area), as well as my experience of 14 years on the ELCA Spiritual Renewal Team, I have observed that although Lutherans hunger and thirst for greater connection and intimacy with God, a significant percentage of them do not regularly practice spiritual disciplines. This stems primarily from a lack of awareness of spiritual practices that fall under the category of spirituality. This project and book are meant to fill in that gap. As I talk with my ecumenical colleagues, they have had similar experiences.

However, this is not true among congregations that are primarily of African descent. From an early age, African American congregations model for children how to connect with God and allow them to practice what they have observed in the midst of worship. For 12 years, I was the only Caucasian member of the Springfield Ministerial Alliance. All the rest were African-American clergy. I observed first hand that they taught children as young as 4 years-old to pray out-loud a free-flowing prayer from the heart during worship.

Audience

This project is important for both lay members and clergy. It provides an easy-to-use resource that clergy and lay people can utilize to introduce multiple spirituality practices in their congregations, ministry settings, and individual lives. The book is not exclusive to Lutheranism in any sense. It can be used by clergy and lay people of almost any Christian denomination. It can be easily adapted for people of other faith traditions as well, often by simply inserting a

different name for the divine. Although primarily designed for small group study, it may also be used by individuals.

This project is also important to our faith communities. They need to see, converse, and relate to persons who both know God and love God. Walter Burghardt writes in *Contemplation: A Long, Loving Look at the Real*, “The world is athirst for women and men who know God and love God; for only such women and men can give to today’s paradoxical world witness to a living God that this age demands.”¹⁶

Field Testing

I believe that it was essential for me to field test the material to validate it. I recruited 14 people to participate in a six-week field test, meeting once per week for 90 minutes. I provided each participant with a copy of the resource I developed, *You Can Connect with God – Starting Today: A Spirituality for the 21st Century*. I asked the participants to read certain chapters in preparation for the class gatherings.

Because of the Covid pandemic, we met via Zoom. This had both advantages and disadvantages. It allowed people from a wider geographical area to participate, but it limited the experience of some of the practices, particularly the labyrinth and prayer walk. I received approval from IRB to do this field testing and from either the pastor or the congregational president of the three congregations where I openly recruited participants. Three other participants, each from a different congregation, came from my direct invitation.

Measuring

Via Zoom, I did a one-on-one interview with each participant both before the class began and again after the class was finished. Everyone participated in the first interview and everyone,

¹⁶ Walter J. Burghardt, “Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real,” *Church* 5 (Winter 1989): 19, [www.alliesonthejourney.com › uploads › 7/4/7burghardt_-_contemplation_a_long_loving.pdf](http://www.alliesonthejourney.com/uploads/7/4/7/burghardt_-_contemplation_a_long_loving.pdf).

but one participated in the final interview. These interviews provided important qualitative data. I also asked each participant to individually complete the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) three times: before we began, at the midpoint and upon completion. This provided me with some hard data that is valid for these 14 participants. It was too small a number and it lacked sufficient diversity to make any universal conclusions. I received written approval via email from Dr. Lynn G. Underwood, the author and copyright holder of the DSES, to use the DSES as a measurement tool.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1 examines the various factors that led to the ministry need: mainline church members do not understand how to connect with God, become aware of God's presence, hear from God, grow closer and more intimate with God. The factors that led to this problem include:

- Seminaries,
- Congregations as unsafe communities for spiritual conversations,
- Pastors,
- Failure to connect spirituality and service,
- Lack of exposure to spiritual practices,
- Culture,
- Leadership,
- Priorities, and
- Work ethic.

This chapter also takes a look at some of the quantitative data available and notable exceptions to this situation.

Chapter 2 examines both the theological and biblical foundations for spirituality presented around the four movements of my spirituality definition: desire, action, interaction and love. Those foundations include . . .

- God's Desire:
 - God Desires Us to Draw Close to God
- Our Desire:
 - Comes from God

Our Hunger and Thirst for Something More
What is Spirituality Seeking?
Seeking Intimacy with God
God's Action:
God Invites Us to Come
Our Action:
Listening is a Key Part of Experiencing God
Seeking an Awareness of God's Presence
God's Interactions:
Revelation Continues
God Answers Prayer
Our Interaction:
Communicating with the Divine
Spirituality is Active, Experiential and Unique
God's Love:
God's Love is Limitless
Our Love:
We love God with Our Whole Being and We Love Others
Spirituality Centers on God
We Live in God's Presence

I will show in chapter 2 that Martin Luther both practiced and taught reading/studying the Bible, prayer and meditation. This chapter also takes a look at one bright light of hope in the ELCA.

Chapter 3 gives an overview of my project including the nuts and bolts of my project and information about the 14 participants. It includes a brief summary of the resource, pre-Covid plans, Covid changes, permissions sought and received, measurements tools, participants broken down by demographics, narrative about the group demographics and notes on each participant. It also includes an outline of the resource *You Can Connect with God – Starting Today: A Spirituality for the 21st Century*.

Chapter 4 details the results of the project both from the quantitative data of the DSES and qualitative data from the interviews before and after the class and personal testimony. Because of the small size of this group and the lack of diversity, it is impossible to draw any quantitative universal conclusions. The quantitative data is accurate for these 14 individuals.

However, we also have qualitative results from the pre- and post-interviews that are shared in this chapter. These narratives can be very instructive of how people sense that changes in their spiritual practices and habits have occurred.

Chapter 5 provides an analysis on both the primary and secondary goals of this project, possible next steps, and a conclusion.

Chapter 1

Identifying the Factors that Led to this Ministry Need, Quantitative Data, and Notable Exceptions

This first chapter identifies a ministry need and nine factors that contributed to that need. In addition, this chapter will explore quantitative data about being spiritual and/or religious as well as the frequency of meditation in various denominations. It will conclude by taking a look at some notable exceptions to this lack of spirituality and the church's unfortunate responses to renewal movements.

The problem is that many mainline Christians are unaware of how they can connect through spirituality with God and experience both God's presence and intimacy with God. People still want to experience God; they just do not see it a happening in historic churches. Maggie Nancarrow in her online blog, *Portfolio of Maggie Nancarrow*, authors an article, "The church is not dying. It's failing. There's a difference." She writes . . . "People are incredibly hungry for God. It isn't that people don't want to experience God. It is that the church of the 1950s is failing to be a place where that happens."¹⁷

There is not just one source of this situation. It is important for us to examine the contributing factors to this lack of spirituality. These factors include seminaries, unsafe communities for spiritual conversations, pastors, a failure to connect spirituality and service, a lack of exposure to spiritual practices, culture, leadership, priorities, and work ethic.

Seminaries

Unfortunately, mainline seminaries have often failed pastoral candidates in this area. Seminary professors often simply do not know how to connect with God themselves, because no one has taught them. So, it is not surprising they fail to teach their students to do so. Mainline

¹⁷ Maggie Nancarrow, "The church is not dying. It's failing," *Portfolio of Maggie Nancarrow*, June 13, 2015, <https://www.maggienancarrow.com/2015/the-church-is-not-dying-its-failing-theres-a-difference/>.

seminaries, for the most part, historically have concentrated their course offerings in theology, biblical interpretation, biblical languages, church history, pastoral care and preaching. As a result, many clergy have not received any formal training in spiritual practices and therefore are uncomfortable teaching spirituality to their members. So often they simply ignore this aspect of ministry.

The emphasis of Lutheran Seminaries has been so focused on biblical languages and biblical/sacramental theology that it has led Lutherans to disregard the experiential presence of God. Joseph D. Driskill, in *Protestant Spiritual Exercises: Theology History and Practice*, writes, “In Lutheran groups, sanctification was paid little heed”¹⁸ and the concerns of the heart were neglected.¹⁹ These attitudes and practices are not unique to the ELCA. Lutheran scholars have ignored the evidence of the importance of meditation in Martin Luther’s life and teaching. John W. Kleinig writing in *Lutheran Theological Journal* says, “This neglect is perhaps symptomatic of a deficiency in modern theology and in present-day Lutheran spirituality. We need to recapture what is best in our traditional piety if we are to temper our prevailing intellectualism.”²⁰

This movement away from the personal experience of God to theology began in very early Christianity. Marshall Davis in his book, *Biblical Nonduality*, claims Paul transformed Christianity from an experience and a movement into a religion based on theology and ethics.²¹ He claims, “Those who wanted to retain the contemplative focus of the original movement moved to the wilderness in the third century to escape what they saw as the increasingly

¹⁸ Joseph D. Driskill, *Protestant Spiritual Exercises: Theology, History, and Practice* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 15.

¹⁹ Driskill, *Protestant Spiritual Exercises*, 23.

²⁰ John W. Kleinig, “The Kindled Heart: Luther on Meditation,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* 20/2&3, (1986): 142-154.

²¹ Marshall Davis, *Biblical Nonduality* (Self-published on Kindle, 2021), 4.

worldliness and legalism of a religion that had lost its way. They were known as the Desert Fathers and Mothers . . .”²²

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest of the New Mexico Province, is the founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation, the academic dean of the center, and a prolific writer. Rohr discovered the same problem in modern Roman Catholic circles, even though for centuries, meditation and contemplation has been taught in monasteries. Around the time of the Reformation, the teaching of spirituality went dark in Catholicism except in monasteries. In Rohr’s book, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*, he gives his analysis of why this has happened which perfectly parallels Protestant seminaries. Rohr writes, “Perhaps this occurred because many of the clergy had never experienced divine union and so could not teach others about it. Catholics and Orthodox make the Holy Spirit dependent upon membership and the Sacraments; Protestants make the Spirit depend on a spiritual decision or faith as a technique.”²³

This is not just true of Catholics, Orthodox, and Lutherans. Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer imply in *Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders*, that this failure to address the spiritual hunger of the people and teach congregants how to connect and recognize the Divine is a wide spread emergency situation. They write . . .

These developments illustrate how important it is for mainline congregations and their leaders to awaken to the spiritual hunger around them . . . mainline congregations need to awaken to the Spirit and the immediate Presence of the Living God in their midst. Without inspired leadership, however, awaking seldom happens . . . So, we believe one of the major tasks currently facing mainline congregations is the spiritual empowerment of leaders, both clergy and lay.²⁴

²² Davis, *Biblical Nonduality*, 5.

²³ Richard Rohr, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009), 20.

²⁴ Johnson and Dreitcer, *Beyond the Ordinary*, loc. 14-18.

Johnson and Dreitcer are correct. We need to awaken to the Spirit and develop a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. Frequently, we are oblivious to the word and nudges of the Spirit. R.T. Kendall exhorts us, in *The Sensitivity of the Spirit: Learning to Stay in the Flow of God's Direction*, that we must always be aware that the Spirit of God may be speaking and leading us at that very moment. As we develop this sensitivity to the Spirit, we are empowered to regularly experience the leading of God.²⁵

Some seminaries have begun to offer a few courses in Spirituality, but in most cases they are electives, meaning one can complete seminary without any training in Spirituality. In reviewing the online catalog of Luther Seminary in Minneapolis, the ELCA's largest seminary, there are eight elective courses that deal in some way with spirituality, but there are **no** required courses in spirituality. Proving this point, Richard Rohr, in *Silent Compassion: Finding God in Contemplation* writes, "We have thus far been totally unsuccessful in getting a single seminary of any denomination to have a contemplative emphasis or curriculum."²⁶

In contrast to seminaries neglect of Luther's own experience, Kleinig claims that in reality, "For Luther, meditation is the key to the study of theology. No one can become a true theologian unless he learns his theology through it."²⁷

Congregations as Unsafe Communities for Spiritual Conversations

We need to be free to talk in the church about our spiritual experiences. Joseph Driskill shares an experience he had as a guest preacher in a small, rural mainline congregation. After worship, one woman shared her personal experience of lengthy times of silence and prayer in the

²⁵ R. T. Kendall, *The Sensitivity of the Spirit: Learning to Stay in the Flow of God's Direction* (Lake May, FL: Charisma House, 2002), 25-26.

²⁶ Richard Rohr, *Silent Compassion: Finding God in Contemplation* (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2014), 68.

²⁷ Kleinig, "The Kindled Heart," 142.

middle of the night after she had risen to care for her special needs son. She had been doing this every night. Then she said, “I have been praying this way for twenty years and never once have I felt I could tell anyone in this church about this experience. I was afraid that they would think I was unbalanced, or a Bible thumper, if I said anything about it.”²⁸

Her story highlights the discomfort mainline Christians have when it comes to personal spiritual experiences. Driskill further says, “It [this woman’s story] demonstrates two serious needs in many churches – the need to nurture an experiential relationship with the holy, and the need to recover practices that invite spiritual growth and development.”²⁹ That is the purpose of my project.

Pastors

Eugene Petersen, writer of “*The Message*” paraphrase of the Bible, argues in his book, “*Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*,” that the problem clearly lies at the feet of ‘shopkeeping pastors.’ He coined this term, ‘shopkeeping pastors,’ to identify how he believes pastors have abandoned their call to serve Christ and Christ’s church. Instead of dedicating themselves, like the early church in the book of Acts, “to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers,”³⁰ they treat the church like a business and devote their time and energy to keeping the shop [church] going by making sure the customers are happy, just like a shopkeeper would do.

As one former director of evangelism for the ELCA said, “Too many pastors are primarily concerned with keeping butts in the pews and bucks in the plate.”³¹ In other words,

²⁸ Driskill, *Protestant Spiritual Exercises*, xii.

²⁹ Driskill, *Protestant Spiritual Exercises*, xii.

³⁰ Acts 2:42 (NRSV).

³¹ Remark made by the director of evangelism at an ELCA conference in 2000 in Chicago.

numbers and dollars have become their goal, and maybe even their god!³² That is strong language, but it points to a significant problem in the church. It may be fostered unintentionally by the format of and the questions on required reports submitted annually by ELCA pastors for their congregations. Those reports are primarily about numbers and dollars. This raises two questions:

Is the call of God for pastors to be successful or faithful?
Are the only criteria for success increasing attendance and giving?

Pastors are busy meeting the demands of ministry. We tend to spend our time in ‘doing’ rather than in ‘being.’ Some pastors have fallen into the trap of “. . . the unholy trinity of false self: I am what I do, I am how much I do, I am how well I do it.”³³

If pastors have not been taught how, perhaps even discouraged from seeking to connect with God in ways other than Word and Sacrament, and their comfort level with spirituality is low, it is no wonder that pastors and deacons have neglected to teach spirituality to their people.

Martha Grace Reese, president of GraceNet, Inc., shares what one pastor involved in the Mainline Evangelism Project said to her regarding the results of this missing piece in clergy training. This pastor said, “Tell them you cannot give what you don’t have. So much that can happen in the church is led or stopped by how healthy my relationship with Christ is. It’s consistent openness to God that really matters.”³⁴

My project book, *You Can Connect with God – Starting Today*, is intended to be a resource for pastors, deacons and lay leaders to use in teaching spirituality to others.

Failure to Connect Spirituality and Service

³² Eugene Petersen, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress: 2004), 1-2.

³³ Yaconelli, *Growing Souls*, 28.

³⁴ Martha Grace Reese, *Unbinding Your Heart: 40 Days of Prayer and Faith Sharing* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 37.

It is imperative that we do not stop at developing a close and intimate relationship with God for ourselves. There must be more. There has to be a follow up. We cannot just spend all our time basking in the presence of God and failing to do the work of God's people. At the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter wanted to stay on the mountain and savor this mountaintop experience.³⁵ But that was not possible. There were people waiting for Jesus' ministry down in the valley. Neither can we be so busy doing God's work that we fail to make time to commune with God. We all need to have both a Mary's side, that sits at the feet of Jesus, and a Martha's side, that moves into action and does the work.³⁶ Neither one alone is enough! If only the denominations would combine the taglines of the United Church of Christ, "God is still speaking" and the ELCA's tagline, God's work. Our hands," into "God is still speaking. God's work. Our hands."

Social action is good. Feeding the hungry is good. Caring for creation is not only good, but essential. These are good things for Christians to be doing. However, this is only one aspect of the Christian faith. Figuratively sitting at the feet of Jesus through various kinds of spirituality provides the motivation to do these acts of kindness. In response to the lavish love of God, we respond in loving God and neighbor. The more we sit at the feet of Jesus, the more we are led to emulate the Good Samaritan.

Generally, Lutherans have failed to connect the dots between our relationship with God and serving humanity. Lutherans are leaders in humanitarian efforts around the world, but we have not successfully tied that to prayer, meditation and contemplation. We have failed to articulate how our spiritualities connect with serving. Nancarrow writes, "We've failed to be mature and sincere in our faith, not the other way around. If we can't give people a space to meet

³⁵ Luke 9:28-32, paraphrase.

³⁶ Luke 10:38-42, paraphrase.

the God that wants to meet them, then we have failed in our mission.”³⁷ Today’s Lutherans are quick to serve and work for social justice, yet slow to name a spiritual foundation for that work.

It would be very easy to correct this problem by the Presiding Bishop, synod bishops, pastors, and deacons to regularly say . . . “We pray and we serve. Doing acts of kindness grow out of our spirituality. We serve others to fulfill God’s instruction through the prophet Micah ‘to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.’”³⁸ Or they could say, “Jesus was clear about expectations of his followers . . .”

I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me.³⁹

And that is why we are starting a food pantry, a clothing drive, a Habitat build, a prison ministry, etc.” Too often we simply assume people know and/or understand that, but frequently that is simply not true. We need to explain the why beyond the need and connect it theologically as this is what followers of Jesus do. This is how we love our neighbor as ourselves. Too often we have failed in our ability to explain why we do what we do in such a way that connects people to God.

Lack of Exposure to Spiritual Practices

The urgency of the need for the spiritual awakening that Rohr, Johnson, Dreitcer, and Kendall wrote about, was not only true 20 years ago and 10 years ago, but I firmly believe that it is even more crucial today. Within American Christianity there is a lack of sufficient exposure to the multiplicity of spirituality practices. Rohr, Johnson and Dreitcer are clear that they believe the problem resides primarily in the failure of seminaries to provide formal training in

³⁷ Nancarrow, “The church is not dying.”

³⁸ Micah 6:8 (NRSV).

³⁹ Matthew 25:34-36 (The Message).

Spirituality. They write, “Our observation suggests that many ministers have no formal training in spiritual formation, and as a consequence most lay leaders lack a mature awareness of the Spirit.”⁴⁰

Studies have shown many followers of Jesus do not communicate regularly with God in prayer. Daniel Henderson, pastor and president of Strategic Renewal, in his book, *Fresh Encounters* goes so far to say based on his experience. . . “Prayer is the most often talked about, but the least practiced discipline in the Christian life.”⁴¹ Yet, prayer is one of the essential keys to a healthy spiritual life, healthy congregations, and healthy denominations. We need to change the priorities of the church.

Culture

Today most American mainline denominations are slowly dying.⁴² Ryan P. Burge, Eastern Illinois University political scientist professor and co-founder of the “Religion in Public” weblog, tweeted that “Mainline is a tradition that has declined rapidly over the last 40 years, while ‘nones’ have risen just as dramatically. It seems that a lot of kids who were raised mainline left religion entirely – their parents stayed. But, that means mainlines are going to face an age cliff soon.”⁴³ In “As ‘Nones’ Increase, Mainline Protestantism Is Headed For An Age Cliff,” Terry Mattingly, concludes from Ryan P. Burge’s tweet that “With

⁴⁰ Johnson and Dreitcer, *Beyond the Ordinary*, loc. 18.

⁴¹ Daniel Henderson, *Fresh Encounters* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), 24.

⁴² “The Decline of Mainline Churches in America,” YouTube video, Feb. 26, 2019, time 4:35, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrcQNzr36KU>. See Appendix B for a screenshot showing a graph from the video. Note: Although I do not agree with his analysis of the data, the data stands on its own.

⁴³ Ryan P. Burge (@ryanburg), “Mainline is a tradition that has declined rapidly over the last 40 years,” Twitter, Aug. 17, 2019, <https://twitter.com/ryanburge/status/1162791535064358912>, quoted in in Terry Mattingly, “As ‘Nones’ Increase, Mainline Protestantism Is Headed For An Age Cliff,” Religion Unplugged, Aug. 30, 2019, <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2019/8/30/as-nones-increase-mainline-protestantism-is-headed-for-an-age-cliff>.

that in mind, it's hard not to connect the aging mainline numbers with the rising tide of the 'religiously unaffiliated.'”⁴⁴

It is not so much that these generations have rejected the church, they simply find it irrelevant to their lives and/or faith. They see no benefit in sitting in church for an hour and being a spectator. They sense little, if any connection to their lives. They ask, “Where was the church when America committed genocide against the Native Americans? Where was the church when we enslaved black Africans? Where was the church when we put Japanese Americans in internment camps? Where was the church when we ignored the torture of prisoners following 9/11? Where is the church in the struggles today against discrimination of trans-youth, black and brown people, immigrants, women, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community? Where is the church fighting for our earth against big oil and other causes of climate change? Where is the church speaking out loudly against voter suppression?”⁴⁵

Far too often, either the church was on the wrong side of these issues, or the church was silently missing in action. The church in general has failed on every one of these societal and moral issues itemized above! When today's generations claim the church is irrelevant, it is understandable. There is no justification for the failure of the church to lead on these important social issues. We are guilty as charged. The church should be the leaders in those struggles. We should have been willing to take strong stands and actions against these atrocities. As Martin Luther took a firm theological stance at the time of the Reformation, Christianity could have taken a firm social action stance against these inhumane actions by boldly proclaiming, “Here I

⁴⁴ Mattingly, “As 'Nones' Increase.”

⁴⁵ Nancarrow, “The church is not dying”; Maggie Nancarrow, “The church is not dying, part deux: Stories of Resurrection,” Portfolio of Maggie Nancarrow, June 24, 2015, <http://www.maggienancarrow.com/2015/the-church-is-not-dying-part-deux-stories-of-resurrection/>. Nancarrow, an Episcopal priest, identifies some of these concerns that many people, particularly young adults, outside of the church have about the church in her online blog.

stand. I can do no other.” We could have tied our actions to Jesus’ command, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”⁴⁶ If seminaries taught previous generations of pastors how to pray and other spiritual practices, maybe the climate for spirituality might be different. If we start more widely teaching spirituality today, maybe things might be different in the future.

According to a 2020 Gallup Poll, Church membership fell below a majority (47%) for the first time. Most significantly it is a drop of more than 20 points since 1999. When Gallup began measuring church membership in 1937, church membership was at 73%. From 1940 to 2000 it remained near 70%. Jeffrey M. Jones reports that Gallup found . . .

The decline in church membership is primarily a function of the increasing number of Americans who express no religious preference. Over the past two decades, the percentage of Americans who do not identify with any religion has grown from 8% in 1998-2000 to 13% in 2008-2010 and 21% over the past three years.⁴⁷

Membership dropped in all age groupings. This ‘no religious preference’ is now referred to as the ‘nones.’ There is debate among scholars on whether this is less religion, or a new religion.⁴⁸

Where are these losses occurring? It appears that most of the losses are people who have not been fully integrated into the church, but have been on the margins. Mark Movsesian, the director of the Center for Law and Religion at Harvard Law School, concludes that “The rise of the ‘nones’ is not due to a general societal decline in religious fervor, but to a decline in religious affiliation among people whose identification was weak to begin with.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Matthew 22:39 (NRSV); Mark 12:31 (NRSV).

⁴⁷ Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time,” Gallup, Mar. 29, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>.

⁴⁸ Nathaniel Peters, “The Rise of the Nones,” Public Discourse, Aug. 18, 2019, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2019/08/53246/>.

⁴⁹ Mark Movsesian, “The Devout and the Nones,” First Things, Apr. 22, 2019, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2019/04/the-devout-and-the-nones>, quoted in Nathaniel Peters, “The Rise of the Nones,” <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2019/08/53246/>.

One of the outcomes of this membership drop is an increasing number of churches that are closing. Yonat Shimron reported for Religion News Service that a new study by Lifeway Research of 34 Protestant denominations showed that approximately 4,500 churches closed in 2019, an increase of 800 from five years earlier.⁵⁰

Leadership

I was recently invited by the Director of Worship for the ECLA to participate on a conference call concerning contextualizing intercessory prayer in the ELCA. One of the things we talked about was the question: Should our denomination continue to provide weekly written prayers for congregations to adapt and use? Ten participants said “Yes. Absolutely.” I responded differently, saying, “Should we – no. Must we at this point – yes, but we need to intentionally start teaching and empowering people in congregations to write their own intercessory prayers with a goal that five years from now it will no longer be necessary for the denomination to send out written prayers.”

One person was intrigued by the idea while others were shocked in dead silence. It was clear that most were not on board with first empowering and then relinquishing that responsibility for writing and praying in worship to the lay members of the congregations. Who is not in touch? Could this be just one small example of why mainline congregations are dying a slow death?

Bishop Anne Edison-Albright, ELCA Bishop of the East Central Synod of Wisconsin, later that day, reflected in a an email to the participants on that call, seems to want to straddle the fence endorsing both ideas. She writes . . .

The more I think about it, the more I wonder if changing what's offered on *Sundays and Seasons* would impact the prayer practices in ELCA congregations;

⁵⁰ Yonat Shimron, “Study: More Churches Closing Than Opening,” Religion News Service, accessed May 26, 2021, <https://religionnews.com/2021/05/26/study-more-churches-closing-than-opening/>.

if we switch to a model that was more focused on helps for people writing their own prayers . . . I love the idea of an intentional multi-year period of transition with training, tools (building on the tools that already exist, and are wonderful) and various forms of encouragement and invitation. I still don't know that I'm completely on board with the idea of the pre-written model prayers completely going away. If we're committed to the weird and wonderful, peculiar style of prayer that is intercessory prayer, modeling still seems like a good way to teach it, as one resource of many, maybe, that gives an idea of how to pray in this particular way.⁵¹

In 2017, on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, in an essay published in the *State-Journal Register* (Springfield, IL) on the Beliefs page, I called for a new reformation that focused on an experiential faith and focusing on the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25, and less emphasis on the writings of St. Paul. The responses were either to ignore it, or claim there was no need for it, or to dismiss the idea completely as too radical.

Priorities

One of the key emphases of the ELCA is “striving for justice and peace in all the earth.”⁵² This is characteristic of a denomination that values action for others above inner connections with God. Yet, the ELCA remains the whitest major denomination in America.⁵³ We have prioritized external acts over internal acts, ignoring Jesus’ teaching to “clean the inside of the cup first and then worry about the outside.”⁵⁴ Both are essential.

Work Ethic

⁵¹ The invitation to the conference call came from John Weit, Assistant to the Presiding Bishop for Worship. Later that day (June 21, 2021), Anne Edison-Albright sent out her reflections in an email to the group. *Sundays and Seasons* is an ELCA online subscription service that provides resources for pastors and worship leaders for each Sunday and festival of the liturgical church year.

⁵² “STRIVE for Justice and Peace in All the Earth,” ELCA, accessed Sept. 1, 2021, https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices/Living-Our-Baptismal-Covenant/Strive?_ga=2.163235964.1305813729.1643156860-601847890.1643156860.

⁵³ Michael Lipka, “The most and least racially diverse U.S. religious groups,” Pew Research Center, July 27, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/>.

⁵⁴ Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2009), 3.

Lutherans have fallen into the trap that Walter Burghardt explains in *Church* journal that Americans feel guilty when we have nothing to do, when we take time off, and just relax. Unless the activity is worthwhile, it is worthless. Burghardt quotes Walter Kerr who says, “Only useful activity is valuable, meaningful, moral. Activity that is not clearly, concretely useful to oneself or to others is worthless, meaningless, and immoral.”⁵⁵ Burghardt explains, “That is why the introductory question at a party is not ‘Who are you?’ but ‘What do you do?’”⁵⁶ Many Lutherans are of Northern European descent and grew up with a work ethic that simply does not allow them to imagine spending 30 minutes in silent meditation and/or contemplation. Twenty years ago, an annual retreat was held for all the rostered leaders in my synod that included time for prayer and reflection. In order to “have a more productive use of time,” it has been transformed into a theological conference. It is discouraging to see the church take steps backward.

Quantitative Data

There are a few studies that provide us with data. First is the data regarding how people self-identify themselves using the categories religious, spiritual, both, or neither and second is a study on frequency of meditation among denominations.

In a 2017 national survey by Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization specializing in research at the intersection of religion, values, and public life, found that of people who self-identify as white mainline Christians:

42 percent are neither religious nor spiritual

⁵⁵ Walter Kerr, *The Decline of Pleasure* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 48, quoted in Walter J. Burghardt, “Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real,” *Church*. Winter, 1989, 15
[www.alliesonthejourney.com › uploads › 7/4/7burghardt_-_contemplation_a_long_loving.pdf](http://www.alliesonthejourney.com/uploads/7/4/7/burghardt_-_contemplation_a_long_loving.pdf).

17 percent are religious but not spiritual
18 percent are spiritual but not religious
23 percent are spiritual and religious.

That means that 59 percent of those who self-identify as white mainline Christians do not consider themselves to be spiritual!⁵⁷

Pew Research in their 2014 study of the frequency of meditation among both religious groups and then Mainline Protestants by denominations determined that the percentage of Evangelical Lutheran Church in America members who meditate once a week was 32%. That was the lowest among 8 Protestant groups interviewed and the second lowest among interfaith groupings.⁵⁸ Philip Hirsch, Executive Director the Domestic Mission Unit of the ELCA on a conference call with the ELCA Spiritual Renewal Team said that, “The ELCA does not have a culture of prayer. I would like to see that changed.”⁵⁹ At least one of the top leaders of the ELCA recognizes the problem and would like it changed, yet six months later he let go of the staff person who was Director of Discipleship, *Book of Faith*, Prayer and Renewal and did not replace her.

Notable Exceptions

We close this chapter by taking a look at three notable exceptions to this lack of spirituality among mainline Christians as well as the dismissive response of the church to reform movements.

The first was the pietistic movement in Germany and Norway beginning in the 17th century that encouraged and valued personal spiritual experience over theology. It spread to the United States as well, particularly among Norwegian Lutherans. It seems to have eventually

⁵⁷ Raney, Cox, and Jones, “Searching for Spirituality.”

⁵⁸ “Frequency of meditation,” Pew Research Center. See Appendix A.

⁵⁹ Philip C. Hirsch, conference call with the ELCA Spiritual Renewal Team, June 9, 2020.

either morphed into social action as opposed to personal experience of the Spirit, or just ignored the need for a personal encounter with God.

Methodism was a reform movement among Anglicans led by the Wesley brothers. It originally emphasized both an intimate, personal relationship with God and social action, especially working to eliminate the slave trade in England. John Wesley's Social Manifesto is as applicable today as it was in the 18th century. Wesley writes . . .

1. Reduce the gap between rich people and poor people
2. Help everyone to have a job
3. Help the poorest, including introducing a living wage
4. Offer the best possible education
5. Help everyone to feel they can make a difference
6. Promote tolerance
7. Promote equal treatment for women
8. Create a society based on values and not on profits and consumerism
9. End all forms of slavery
10. Avoid getting into wars
11. Share the love of God with everyone
12. Care for the environment.⁶⁰

At the same time, Wesley was concerned about the inner spiritual life. Wesley did not see there was a choice between personal salvation and social action, but instead saw faith as both/and point of view. Our lives in Christ are both personal and social. Wesley sought to bring social action and personal relationship with God together. As Paul Wesley Chilcote writes in *Recapturing the Wesleys' Vision*, "It is their emphasis upon the connection between faith and works . . . If your faith as a Christian is genuine, then other people will be able to see it lived out in loving ways . . ." ⁶¹ In fact, they weekly asked each other . . . "How is it with your soul?" ⁶²

⁶⁰ "John Wesley's Manifesto," The Methodist Church, accessed Jan. 30, 2022, https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/10392/john-wesleys-manifesto-newdocx.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1qZjFKuTisURhK1hEFbpWBnEQxnI63xAkjrgifYJCj1yMEfIHN_t2vNpiQ.

⁶¹ Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Recapturing the Wesleys' Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 16.

⁶² Joseph Yoo, "How Is It With Your Soul?" Ministry Matters, Aug. 2, 2016, <https://www.ministrymatters.com/lead/entry/7571/how-is-it-with-your-soul>.

How would it change our churches today if we asked and answered that question weekly?

However, it appears to an outsider that social action has become the primary emphasis.

The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church includes . . .

The United Methodist Church believes God's love for the world is an active and engaged love, a love seeking justice and liberty. We cannot just be observers. So we care enough about people's lives to risk interpreting God's love, to take a stand, to call each of us into a response, no matter how controversial or complex. The church helps us think and act out a faith perspective, not just responding to all the other 'mind-makers-up' that exist in our society.⁶³

Social action and spirituality are not in conflict with each other. In fact social action is one form of spirituality. However, we cannot champion social action and ignore communing with God, nor vice versa. Nor can we replace one with the other. Timothy Charles Murphy writes in *Sustaining Hope in an Unjust World* . . . “Just as this is a book about social justice, it is also a book about religion . . . Many activists with a spiritual side or spiritualists with a social side cannot separate the two. Social justice and religion [spirituality] are two sides of the same coin.”⁶⁴

In 1967, the charismatic renewal movement broke out in Pittsburgh and quickly spread primarily among American Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, and other Protestants. It encouraged the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. However, church officials never endorsed this movement and often discouraged it as individualism, filled with ecstatic experiences that valued personal encounters of the divine that they could not understand nor control. Although there was an impact on increased prayer and Bible study, it faded away by the late 1980's.⁶⁵

⁶³ “Our Social Principles,” United Methodist Church, accessed Mar. 15, 2022, <https://www.umc.org/en/what-we-believe/basics-of-our-faith/our-social-positions>.

⁶⁴ Murphy, *Sustaining Hope in an Unjust World*, 8-9.

⁶⁵ J. Lee Grady, “The Charismatic Movement: Dead or Alive?” *Charisma Magazine*, 2009, <https://www.charismamag.com/blogs/fire-in-my-bones/5910-the-charismatic-movement-dead-or-alive>.

When I was in seminary in the early 1970's, the charismatic movement was not only discouraged, but also openly ridiculed by seminary professors. In time, this reform movement faded away. Stephanie Bliese in her article in *Word & Wind*, "1968: Strong Winds, Earthquakes, Fire, Gentle Whispers, and the Lutheran's Missed Opportunity" makes this critical analysis. "Yet, in spite of the groundswell of spiritual renewal that made its way through the Lutheran denominations, the charismatic renewal never quite managed to make a long-term impact on leadership or denominational structures."⁶⁶

In a critical review of the Lutheran response to the Charismatic movement, Bliese writes in her article in *Word & Wind*, "Looking back, however, it is hard not to see the failure of any Lutheran denomination to change due to the charismatic renewal as a failure to join one of the brightest stars of the future Christian landscape."⁶⁷ She is particularly critical of the American Lutheran Church (now part of the ELCA) saying, "One of the most intriguing aspects of the year was the American Lutheran denomination's conscious rejection of one of the most powerful movements in American and global Christianity—the charismatic renewal."⁶⁸ Bliese summarizes the failed response of the ALC to the Charismatic Movement in the words of Charles Miller as "benign neglect."⁶⁹ She writes . . .

Just like their Missouri Synod brethren, the leadership of the ALC saw the movement as potentially harmful to their church body and, in spite of an undeniable growth from lay and clergy, expressed the need to see it die out not from any aggressive stance but instead from negligence and ambivalence. Which it inevitably accomplished. According to Rev. Charles Miller, perhaps the best way to sum up the ALC approach was "benign neglect," because instead of exploring the challenges presented, they ignored them to the extent they were able.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Stephanie Bliese, "1968: Strong Winds, Earthquakes, Fire, Gentle Whispers, and the Lutheran's Missed Opportunity," *Word & Wind* 38, no. 2 (Spring 2018), 163.

⁶⁷ Bliese, "1968: Strong Winds," 163.

⁶⁸ Bliese, "1968: Strong Winds," 159.

⁶⁹ Eric Jonas Swenson, "The Meaning of a Movement: Lutheran Charismatic Renewal," Holy Trinity, accessed Apr. 13, 2022, <https://archive.ph/uTHn8>, quoted in Stephanie Bliese "1968: Strong Winds," 166.

⁷⁰ Bliese, "1968: Strong Winds," 166.

It was indeed an opportunity missed!

The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LC-MS) recognized a need for renewal in an official document published by Concordia Publishing House and produced by the ‘Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod’ . . .

Charismatics hold that “baptism with the Holy Spirit” meets a need within the Christian church as well as in their own personal lives. Their primary objective is to produce a spiritual renewal within Christendom. Like many other Christians they are deeply concerned over conditions within the institutional church. They see a lack of commitment on the part of many who claim church membership. They sense that many Christians do not find in their faith the joy, peace, and certainty which members of the apostolic church evidently experienced, that many Christians do not demonstrate the love for one another that they should, that in many congregations there is a lack of emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, and that church services are often too impersonal and formal.⁷¹

But at the same time, the report found that the solution to this problem of a lack of spiritual renewal was not found in the charismatic movement because of serious theological errors . . .

While charismatics contend that “baptism with the Holy Spirit” is the cure for these ills within Christendom, it is apparent that some of the practices and theological tenets of this movement conflict with Biblical doctrine, thereby causing divisions within various congregations. Perhaps the most serious doctrinal problem of this movement is its tendency to claim direct spiritual illumination apart from the Word . . .⁷²

Some LC-MS districts went so far as to conduct heresy trials and remove some pastors involved in the charismatic movement.⁷³ Stephanie Bliese sums up the LC-MS’s response, “The message was sent that such religious renewal was not accepted by the church and would not be

⁷¹ *The Lutheran Church and Charismatic Movement: Guidelines for Congregations and Pastors: A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.* (Apr. 1977). <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/9046DE2C-E03B-4508-B823-EEE0F007829C?>

⁷² *The Lutheran Church and Charismatic Movement*, 3.

⁷³ *The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology: A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, (Jan. 1972), 5, <https://vdocuments.net/charismatic-movement-and-lutheran-theology-1972.html>.

supported by the leadership, thus pushing proponents either to release their new beliefs or to hide them from others.”⁷⁴

In each of these movements, detractors, usually church officials or theologians, claimed participants were valuing heart and experience over both the Bible and mind. In doing so they ignored the biblical record that Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Saul (Paul), Joseph, and Mary as well as the historical record of Luther’s “tower experience” and Wesley’s “heart strangely warmed experience,” who all allowed their individual experience of the divine to shape their lives, even if it did not seem reasonable from a practical viewpoint.

This first chapter identified the situation that many mainline Caucasian church members desire a more intimate relationship with God where they sense God’s presence and love, but do not know how. In this chapter at least nine factors were identified as contributing to this problem.

This chapter also looked at some quantitative data on how people identify themselves spiritually and a study on frequency of meditation among denominations. This chapter closed by looking at three notable exceptions to this need and the unfortunate response of the church.

Chapter 2 will explore both the biblical and theological foundations for living a life of spirituality. Using the four movements of my definition of spirituality: desire, action, interaction and love, we will explore how both the individual and the divine moves through this process. We will take a look at “Dwelling in the Word” spiritual practice as one bright hope in the ELCA.

⁷⁴ Bliese, “1968: Strong Winds,” 165.

Chapter 2

Theological and Biblical Foundations

In Chapter 2, I will present both the theological and biblical foundations for living a life of spirituality using a framework of the four actions from our definition of spirituality: desire, action, interaction and love by us and by God. Then we will examine briefly one bright light of hope for the ELCA in the spiritual practice of *Dwelling in the Word*.

Our working definition of Spirituality is . .

***Spirituality is our desire, put into action, to interact with the divine
and then to live our lives loving God and neighbor.***

Spirituality always begins with God and ends with us. Both my project and this paper adopt the position that God is always present, everywhere, at all times, regardless of whether we are aware of the presence of God or not. God was with David wherever he went and God knew David intimately even before he was born. The same is true for us. Psalm 139 (The Passion Translation) says . . .

¹ Lord, you know everything there is to know about me.

² You perceive every movement of my heart and soul,
and you understand my every thought before it even enters my mind.

³⁻⁴ You are so intimately aware of me, Lord.

You read my heart like an open book
and you know all the words I'm about to speak
before I even start a sentence!

You know every step I will take before my journey even begins.

⁵ You've gone into my future to prepare the way,
and in kindness you follow behind me
to spare me from the harm of my past.
You have laid your hand on me!

⁶ This is just too wonderful, deep, and incomprehensible!
Your understanding of me brings me wonder and strength.

⁷ Where could I go from your Spirit?
Where could I run and hide from your face?

⁸ If I go up to heaven, you're there!
If I go down to the realm of the dead, you're there too!

- ⁹ If I fly with wings into the shining dawn, you're there!
If I fly into the radiant sunset, you're there waiting!
- ¹⁰ Wherever I go, your hand will guide me;
your strength will empower me.
- ¹¹ It's impossible to disappear from you
or to ask the darkness to hide me,
for your presence is everywhere, bringing light into my night.
- ¹² There is no such thing as darkness with you.
The night, to you, is as bright as the day;
there's no difference between the two.
- ¹³ You formed my innermost being, shaping my delicate inside
and my intricate outside,
and wove them all together in my mother's womb.
- ¹⁴ I thank you, God, for making me so mysteriously complex!
Everything you do is marvelously breathtaking.
It simply amazes me to think about it!
How thoroughly you know me, Lord!
- ¹⁵ You even formed every bone in my body
when you created me in the secret place;
carefully, skillfully you shaped me from nothing to something.
- ¹⁶ You saw who you created me to be before I became me!
Before I'd ever seen the light of day,
the number of days you planned for me
were already recorded in your book.
- ¹⁷⁻¹⁸ Every single moment you are thinking of me!
How precious and wonderful to consider
that you cherish me constantly in your every thought!
O God, your desires toward me are more
than the grains of sand on every shore!
When I awake each morning, you're still with me.

No matter where we go, God is present and is waiting for us to make connection.

I am organizing the theological and biblical foundations of this paper around both God's movements and our movements: desire, action, interaction and love. Because our spirituality always begins with God, I will arrange these movements with God's desire first, followed by our desire. That will continue for each of the movements. For some of the movements there is more than one possible action.

God's Desire: God Desires Us to Draw Close to God

The theological stance of this project is that God desires all people to draw close to God-self. James writes: “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”⁷⁵ While we cannot manufacture God’s presence, nor God’s speaking to us, we can do our part by setting the environment through our spirituality to become aware of God’s presence, hear God, and see God at work in our lives, churches, communities and world. The evidence of this desire of God for us to grow close is that God is the one who creates the desire within us. This is clear in *Luther’s Works*, “This desire comes from faith in God through Jesus Christ. It is a supernatural gift ‘sent down from heaven’ and given to those who trust in Christ and pray for it.”⁷⁶

Our Desire Comes from God

This desire, this hunger and thirst for the divine comes from God. It is innate in all people. In most cultures, we discover that people have sought the divine. Tam Hunt writing in the *Santa Barbara Independent* shares his own experience of search for meaning and spirituality. He concludes . . .

Yogananda, an Indian mystic in the Kriya Yoga tradition, said it well: ‘Everything else can wait, but your search for God cannot wait.’ In this search for authentic spirituality, experience seems to precede reason for most people. Words and concepts only go so far. For others, experience without a rational basis for spiritual views is not enough. For yet others, reason alone may well be enough to accept God and the ground of being as real, even without the profound direct experience of God as Source or as Summit.⁷⁷

Martin Luther believed that his desire and ours for God comes from God. Luther writes, “As desire for the Law of the Lord is not by nature in any man, it must be conferred on us from heaven by our heavenly Father . . .”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ James 4:8 (NRSV).

⁷⁶ *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 14, *Selected Psalms III* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1955), 297.

⁷⁷ Tam Hunt, “Seeking the Divine: Spirituality in the Information Age,” *Santa Barbara Independent*, Apr. 14, 2012, <https://www.independent.com/2012/04/14/seeking-divine/>.

⁷⁸ *Luther’s Works*, 14:300.

Our Desire: Our Hunger and Thirst for Something More

We are never satisfied with what the world can offer us. It will always leave us feeling there must be more. We wind up asking the same question that Peggie Lee asked in the song *Is That All There Is?* Her house burns down, she has a good time dancing and drinking with friends, she goes to the circus, she falls in love and one day he leaves, but still there is something missing, and so she sings . . .

And as I sat there watching
I had the feeling that something was missing
I don't know what, but when it was over I said to myself
Is that all there is?⁷⁹

When we are so dissatisfied with life, then we ask “Is that all there is?” that is really just an expression of our hunger and thirst for the divine.

Our Desire: What is Spirituality Seeking?

Spirituality is certainly not seeking perfection, or holiness, or control, or the keys to heaven. Spirituality is not where we seek to impose our will on God, but rather to seek to have our hearts moved by the heart of God and bring our hearts, minds and will into congruence with God’s heart, mind and will. Luther said that spirituality brings a new birth, saying, “Meditation changes man’s being and, almost like baptism, gives him a new birth. Here the passion of Christ performs its natural and noble work, strangling the Old Adam and banishing all joy, delight, and confidence which a man could derive from other creatures . . .”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, “Is That All There Is?” Peggie Lee, Capitol Studios, 1969. The song is based on Thomas Mann's short fictional story *Disillusionment*. A quick read will reveal that a good portion of the lyrics come straight from the story, right down to a child watching a fire and the question “Is that all there is to it?”

⁸⁰ *Luther’s Works*, ed. Martin O. Dietrich, vol. 42, *Devotional Writings I* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 11.

Spirituality is intimacy and union with God.⁸¹ It is experiencing the presence of God and the peace that God's presence brings no matter what is happening in or around you. That presence and potential peace has always been within, we just have not known how to access it, or even that it was there. Spirituality is about our personal relationship with God. Rohr agrees, saying, "At this point God becomes more a verb than a noun, more a process than a conclusion, more an experience than a dogma, more a personal relationship than an idea. There is Someone dancing with you and you are not afraid of making mistakes . . . God is suddenly as available and accessible as the very thing we do constantly – breathe."⁸²

Our Desire: Seeking Intimacy with God

A key anticipated result of spirituality is a sense of intimacy with God. What is this intimacy? Intimacy with God moves far beyond a transactional relationship where I confess and repent of my sin and God grants me forgiveness. It is an intimacy that moves beyond just a close friendship. It moves beyond where I trust God enough to not worry about the future. Intimacy with God requires a naked vulnerability, and an open and complete honest dialogue leading to a sense of a transforming union between the person and God. It often begins with developing a friendship with God. This is a friendship where we totally trust God for all things in life and in death. It is living the Gospel by loving God and loving our neighbor, even the ones we do not like, with the same unconditional love which Jesus loves us.⁸³ Often we do not achieve this intimacy. Thomas Keating, in *Intimacy with God: Centering Prayer*, explains that God wants us, and nothing less. Keating writes, "Human nature prefers to offer substitute sacrifices to placate

⁸¹ Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 16

⁸² Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 23, 26.

⁸³ Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 5.

God rather than to offer the sacrifice that God clearly states in Scripture is the only acceptable one, which is the gift of ourselves.”⁸⁴

Martin Luther believed that if we want to communicate with God through meditation we need to be still in our hearts and minds. Luther wrote in a sermon on Christ’s Nativity . . .

This lesson is like the sun: in a placid pool it can be seen clearly and warms the water powerfully; but in a rushing current it cannot be seen as well, nor can it warm the water. So if you wish to be illumed and warmed here, to see God’s mercy and wonderous needs, so that your heart is filled with fire and light and becomes reverent and joyous then go where you may be still and impress the picture deep into your heart.⁸⁵

The Bible tells us that God speaks in many and various ways. In the book of Hebrews, we read, “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.”⁸⁶

Although God spoke most clearly through Jesus, I believe that God continues to speak in many and various ways. The United Church of Christ is most clear on that subject with its tagline . . . “God is still speaking.” On the UCC web site, this theological position - that revelation from God is not only something of the past, but also occurs in the present, and will continue to do so in the future - is presented . . .

If you think God’s not finished with you yet, guess what? God’s not even finished with God yet. God isn’t finished with you, or finished with the church or our world, or even letting us know more about God’s own compassion, justice, hope, and truth. If you are open, if you listen carefully, you’ll discover what God is saying to this generation at this time in history. There’s more good news to be heard!

This understanding of God’s “revelation” is a central aspect of United Church of Christ faith. We believe that God was revealed in the past, but also in the present and the future. In the Bible, God was known through covenants with people and nations, through prophets and teachers, through conflicts and commandments, in visions and songs, and through the followers of Jesus and the church. God acted

⁸⁴ Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 5.

⁸⁵ *Luther’s Works*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand, vol. 52, *Sermons 2* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 9-10.

⁸⁶ Hebrews 1:1-2a (NRSV).

profoundly in the life and ministry, even in the death, of Christ. On Easter, God declared in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ‘I’ll never, never stop speaking. Alleluia!’ Throughout history, in moments of compassion, justice, and peace, in our worship, sacraments, prayer, seeking, action, and silence, God continues to speak.⁸⁷

In this project and paper as well as in life, I assume that indeed God is still speaking today and therefore, it is important that we assist people, individually and collectively, to be discerning of God’s Spirit and direction for their lives and mission.

God’s Action: God Invites Us to Come

Jesus said . . . “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”⁸⁸ Jesus invites us to come. As the hymn says, we can come just as we are, with confusion, conflicts, doubts, fears and past record of sins. God just says: “Come.” God isn’t expecting that we will first clean up our act. God is inviting us to come and God will help us clean-up our lives. In the words of Charlotte Elliot’s hymn “Just As I Am” . . .

Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt;
Fightings within, and fears without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!⁸⁹

There is a fictional story that I think illustrates the lavishness of God’s grace perfectly. There’s a party going on in heaven. It is filled with saints and sinners. God the Father goes over to Peter, and asks, “Have you seen my son? Do you know where he is? Peter replies, “Yes, Jesus is outside by the gate. He is waiting to open it for Judas.”

Our Action: Listening Is a Key Part of Experiencing God

⁸⁷ “We Listen to a Still Speaking God,” UCC, accessed Jan, 30, 2022, https://www.ucc.org/who-we-are/about/general-synod/general-synod-resolutions-regarding-environmental-justice/vitality/vitality_boost-your-vitality/vitality_what-matters/vitality_what-matters_we-listen-for-a/.

⁸⁸ Matthew 11:28 (NRSV).

⁸⁹ Charlotte Elliott, “Just As I Am,” 1835, in *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978), 296.

Luther says that . . . “The best thing we can do is to be still and listen to him who can do better than we can.”⁹⁰ In an interpretation of the Acts 2 story of the first Pentecost on the *Living Lutheran Lectionary Blog*, Pastor Delmer Chilton says that the miracle of Pentecost could be described as the miracle of “spiritual hearing” instead of the miracle of “speaking in tongues.” Chilton writes . . .

“Acts 2:6 and 2:8 clearly indicate that, no matter where you were from or what language you understood, if you were in the street that day, you heard the gospel proclaimed in your native tongue—‘each one heard them speaking in the native language of each,’ and ‘how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?’ I have, at times, wondered ‘Had I been there, would I have heard Peter in my native language, saying something Southern like, ‘Now, y’all settle down and listen here?’ . . . The question arises: Was this a miracle of speaking? Or a miracle of hearing? Of listening?’”⁹¹

Chilton goes on to ask . . . “How much time and effort do we spend on developing our listening skills – learning to listen for God . . . ?”⁹² And then Chilton says in the clearest theological argument that God speaks to us today and desires that we listen . . .

“If God is indeed still speaking, well, what are we to do?

Well, there is no if about it. God is still speaking, and, therefore, it behooves us to be still and listen. Listen when God speaks in the Scriptures. Listen when God speaks in the hymns. Listen when God speaks in the liturgy. Listen when God speaks in the voice of our neighbor. Listen when God speaks in the voice of the stranger. Listen when God speaks in the voice of someone from a different culture, or race, or experience or religion. Listen with your head and with your heart . . .”⁹³

Kleinig says that for Luther, listening was one of the key elements to meditation. He writes, “Any human activity in meditation is thus intended to put that person in a passive and

⁹⁰ *Luther’s Works*, ed. Gustav K. Wiencke, vol. 43, *Devotional Writings II* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 194), 198.

⁹¹ Delmar Chilton, “Living Lutheran Lectionary Blog: The Miracle of Hearing,” May 29, 2017, accessed Mar. 15, 2022, <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2017/05/lectionary-blog-miracle-hearing/>.

⁹² Chilton, Living Lutheran Lectionary Blog: “The Miracle of Hearing”.

⁹³ Chilton, Living Lutheran Lectionary Blog: “The Miracle of Hearing”.

receptive frame of mind. Take for example a piece of music. When we ‘meditate’ on it, we allow it to occupy us inwardly and move us profoundly. By concentrating on it, we let the music have its proper effect on us.”⁹⁴

But do we really listen? On the website *A Time to Laugh*, the writer tells a story “When God Whispers” that may well be too true in our lives.

The man whispered, "God, speak to me," and a meadowlark sang.
But the man did not hear.
So the man yelled, "God, speak to me" Thunder rolled across the sky.
But the man did not listen.
The man looked around and said, "God, let me see you." And a star shone brightly.
But he noticed it not.
And the man shouted, "God, show me a miracle." And a life was born.
But the man was unaware.
So, the man cried out in despair, "Touch me, God, and let me know you are here."
Whereupon, God reached down and touched the man. But the man brushed the butterfly away and walked on.⁹⁵

How often does that happen in our lives? Leaders need to help others understand and practice that just as we learn to pray by praying, we learn to listen by listening for the voice of God. We also can help them understand that God’s voice comes in many and various ways.

Our Action: Spirituality Seeks an Awareness of God’s Presence

One of the fundamental aspects of spirituality is being aware of the presence of God. Intellectually, Christians understand that God is everywhere and therefore we are always in God’s presence, but often we are not aware and/or do not recognize God’s presence in our lives and in the world. Aiden Wilson Tozer in *The Pursuit of God* gives a prayer for those who are ready to have their eyes opened to see and recognize God’s presence . . .

O God and Father,
I repent of my sinful preoccupation with visible things.
The world has been too much with me.

⁹⁴ Kleinig, “The Kindled Heart,” 146.

⁹⁵ “When the Voice of God Whispers,” *A Time to Laugh*, accessed Jan. 25, 2022, <https://www.atimetolaugh.org/godwhispers.html>.

You have [Thou has] been here and I knew it not.
I have been blind to Your [Thy] presence.
Open my eyes that I may behold You [Thee] in and around me.
For Christ's sake, Amen.⁹⁶

Julian of Norwich was a 14th century Christian mystic. It was remarkable for a 14th century woman to be considered a theologian, mystic, prophet, author and feminist. She understood union with God, writing, "The fruit and the purpose of prayer is to be 'oned' with and like God in all things."⁹⁷ After enduring intense pain, she developed the Body Prayer as a simple way to pray without words. Through this prayer she experienced both God's presence and union/intimacy with God. This prayer is a wonderful way to bring all of ourselves into the act of prayer, body, mind, and spirit. It has four simple body postures and four intentions: await, allow, accept and attend . . .

Await God's presence however it may come to you.
Allow a sense of God's presence to come, or not, and be what it is.
Accept as a gift whatever comes or does not come. Accept that you do not know everything, and that you are not in charge.
Attend to what you are called to, willing to be present, and to be God's love in the world however God calls you.

These intentions are key to experiencing the presence of God. We cannot rush it, demand it, or create it. Instead we await patiently in prayer for God to make us aware. Yet, this seeking God's presence is not passive, but active. We need to discover this balance of waiting on the Lord in prayer, silence and patience instead of rushing ahead on our own and asking God's blessings as an afterthought. Our waiting is active. We do not put life on hold, but keep on keeping on, as we seek God's help and direction in our journey of faith and life. Anselm, an 11th century monk and philosopher understood this as he prayed . . .

Teach me to seek you Lord.

⁹⁶ Aiden Wilson Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 1993), 67.

⁹⁷ "The Body Prayer of Julian of Norwich," Cascadia Living Wisdom, accessed Aug. 15, 2021, www.cascadialivingwisdom.com/body-prayer-julian-of-norwich.

Show me where and how . . .

Have sympathy with our work and our efforts to find you.

We can do nothing without you.

You have invited us to come, please now help us.⁹⁸

Like Mary we sit at the feet of the Master and soak in God's presence, not wanting to

move without God's direction. Timothy Jones in *Prayer's Apprentice* calls this "the paradox of doing by not doing, accomplishing by not striving, finding my words by protecting quiet."⁹⁹

Jones goes on to say . . .

I am convinced that I got more done than I otherwise could have by my contemplative inaction, by my stilling myself mentally, by my needy opening to Another [God]. And who knows how much more fruitful my time with those wearied, burdened campus workers turned out for my having chosen prayer over my self-propelled, agitated activity.¹⁰⁰

When Moses was leading the Israelites out slavery in Egypt towards the Promised Land, God assured Moses . . . "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."¹⁰¹ Moses responded, "If your presence doesn't take the lead here, call this trip off right now. How else will it be known that you're with me in this, with me and your people? Are you traveling with us or not? How else will we know that we're special, I and your people, among all other people on this planet earth?"¹⁰² For Moses, God's presence was the single most important thing necessary for him to accomplish what God called him to do.

What is this presence? It is the blessing and favor of God that transforms us. Frank Damazio in *The Gate Church* explains, "The word (presence) denotes the blessing and favor of God turned toward those who worship Him. The presence of God is a presence that fills us up, pervades, permeates and overspreads all who come under it."¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Timothy Jones, *Prayer's Apprentice: A Year with the Great Spiritual Mentors* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000), 91. This version of Anselm's prayer is a rendering by Timothy Jones.

⁹⁹ Jones, *Prayer's Apprentice*, 60.

¹⁰⁰ Jones, *Prayer's Apprentice*, 60.

¹⁰¹ Exodus 33:14 (NRSV).

¹⁰² Exodus 33:15-16 (The Message).

¹⁰³ Frank Damazio, *The Gate Church* (Portland, OR: City Bible Publishing, 2000), 108.

When we are seeking God's presence we are seeking to know God as we know parents, spouse and children. As we are present with others, we will be present with God. Mary prioritized time to be present with Jesus. Martha was busily, frantically trying to get everything ready and just right. She missed being present with all her guests, including Jesus.¹⁰⁴ My oldest sister, Janis, sometimes hosted our family Christmas dinner. She would get things started in the kitchen until her guests arrived. Once we were there, she sat with us and visited without worrying about dinner. My other sister, Nancy, and I would go into the kitchen, finish all the prep and tell the group when dinner was served. While we finished the prep, we complained to each other about doing that prep. But we did not have to do it. No one asked us to. It could have waited a while. We could have chosen to be present like Janis did. What was true for Mary and Martha is also true for us. Richard Rohr says that "Presence is presence is presence. How you do it is how you do everything . . . If you are present, you will eventually and always experience the Presence. It is that simple and that hard."¹⁰⁵

When we are seeking God's presence we are seeking peace, security and direction for our lives individually and corporately. In the Old Testament, God's presence was at times in the dreams, visions, clouds, fire, silence, voice and in the Ark of the Covenant.

We need to ask ourselves individually and corporately two key questions:

Do we discern God's presence?

Do we discern when God is hiding his face from us?¹⁰⁶

Jesus invited his disciples, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."¹⁰⁷ It was an invitation to get away from distractions and focus on God. Jesus invites us,

¹⁰⁴ Luke 10:38-42, summarized.

¹⁰⁵ Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 58-59.

¹⁰⁶ Psalm 13:1, "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" (NRSV).

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 6:31 (NRSV).

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”¹⁰⁸

It is an invitation to get away from distractions and focus on God. Richard J. Beckmen in *Prayer: Beginning Conversations with God* explains, “The word *rest* in the Bible has a special meaning; it means to be in the presence of God without distraction.”¹⁰⁹ Jesus is inviting us to come and be in the presence of God without distraction.

Soul Survivor Church in Watford, England, lost their passion in worship. The fire was gone. They were discerning God’s apparent absence. In response Pastor Mike Pilavachi took drastic action. He stripped away all the music, musicians and instruments to learn again whom they were worshipping and why. After a time, the church rediscovered the depth of worship was Jesus. It was all about Jesus. They rediscovered the presence of Jesus. Out of that experience, Matt Redman wrote the lyrics to “The Heart of Worship” . . .

When the music fades
All is stripped away
And I simply come
Longing just to bring
Something that's of worth
That will bless Your heart

I'll bring You more than a song
For a song in itself
Is not what You have required
You search much deeper within
Through the way things appear
You're looking into my heart

I'm coming back to the heart of worship
And it's all about You,
It's all about You, Jesus
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it
When it's all about You,
It's all about You, Jesus

¹⁰⁸ Matthew 11:28 (NRSV).

¹⁰⁹ Richard J. Beckmen, *Prayer: Beginning Conversations with God* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1995),

King of endless worth
No one could express
How much You deserve
Though I'm weak and poor
All I have is Yours
Every single breath

I'll bring You more than a song
For a song in itself
Is not what You have required
You search much deeper within
Through the way things appear
You're looking into my heart

I'm coming back to the heart of worship
And it's all about You,
It's all about You, Jesus
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it
And it's all about You, It's all about You, Jesus¹¹⁰

As Pastor Mike and Worship Leader Matt Redman discovered, we can also seek and experience God's presence corporately through worship. Any church can become a presence-based church. It is not about how we worship, but why we worship and what is the attitude of our heart.¹¹¹ Terry Teykl in *The Presence Based Church* says that . . .

The question in the Presence based church is not "Are we attracting people?" but rather, "Are we attracting the Presence of God? Does God feel welcomed and honored above all else? . . . The Presence based church, like Mary, is always at the feet of Jesus - in good times and in bad . . . The Presence based church worships to welcome the living God."¹¹²

God's Interaction: Revelation Continues

This project also adopts the position that just as God spoke to the people of God in ancient days, so God continues to reach out to this and future generations. In fact, God has promised it in the book of Joel. God has said . . . "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons

¹¹⁰ Matt Redman, "The Heart of Worship," Thank You Music Ltd., 1999.

¹¹¹ Terry Teykl, *The Presence Based Church* (Muncie, IN: Prayer Point Press, 2003), 147.

¹¹² Teykl, *The Presence Based Church*, 149, 158, 163.

and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.”¹¹³

Some Lutheran theologians reject this idea that God through the Spirit continues to speak to us in dreams and visions, and that there are prophets today speaking to us on behalf of God. Part of this hesitancy among Lutherans to accept continuing revelation by the Spirit stems from the 16th century Lutheran reformers’ condemnation of those whom they called ‘Enthusiasts,’ who believed and taught that God speaks to Christians directly, independent of the Word and Sacraments.¹¹⁴ Can we venture that perhaps those reformers were wrong? We are always on dangerous ground when we attempt to put limits on what God can and cannot do. Clearly, I believe that God speaks to us in the Word and Sacraments as well as in an abundance of other ways as well.

When I was in college, I was a pre-divinity student. I was taught in my college New Testament introduction class that God’s specific revelation to individuals ended with the Bible being codified. They based that idea on the King James Version of 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 . . . “Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”

Those who argue this position claim that ‘the perfect’ in verse 10 refers to the Bible, so since we have the Bible, there is no longer any need for prophecies, tongues or knowledge. From their perspective, God’s revelation is complete. When we adopt this position, it is almost as if we

¹¹³ Joel 2:28 (NRSV).

¹¹⁴ Theodore G. Tappert, trans. and ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 212-213:13, 313:9, 471:13, 536:80.

are cutting out the work of the Spirit and remaking the Trinity into Father, Son and Bible. If we are not careful, we can turn the Bible into a golden calf. Yet, while claiming direct revelation has ceased, in worship we sing in *O Jesus, I Have Promised* . . .

O let me hear thee speaking
In accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion,
The murmurs of self-will.
O speak to reassure me,
To hasten or control;
O speak, and make me listen,
Thou guardian of my soul.¹¹⁵

The interpretation that revelation has ended also ignores verse 12 of 1 Corinthians 13. “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.”¹¹⁶ We are still seeing through the glass dimly. Only when we see God face to face will there no longer be a need for additional revelation. We can well interpret that moment as either when we enter heaven or when Christ comes again.

That college professor who insisted that revelation stopped after the Bible was complete, also pointed to 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NRSV), “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” The problem with this argument is that when 2 Timothy was written, the only Bible that was available was the Old Testament. There was no New Testament.

God’s Interaction: God Answers Our Prayers

¹¹⁵ John Ernest Bode, “Oh Jesus I Have Promised,” 1868, in *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978), 503.

¹¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:12 (NRSV).

God not only hears and listens to our prayers, God also answers our prayers. Jesus promises, “Again, I tell you the truth, if two of you on earth agree about whatever you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you.”¹¹⁷

Our Interaction: Communicating with the Divine

Connecting with God begins simply by communicating with God like we would communicate with a friend. When we talk with a friend we do so with the expectation and trust that the friend will respond to us. When we talk with a friend we not only talk, but we also listen. We are honest in our sharing. If we ask for advice, we are open to follow what our friend tells us. Each of these actions are also true for connecting with God.

Our Interaction: Spirituality is Active, Experiential, and Unique

Spirituality is uniquely our own. It grows out of how God has uniquely made each of us as individuals, with different personalities, intellect, attitudes, gifts, abilities, personal preferences, strengths and weaknesses, as well as different experiences of nurture, upbringing, and theologies. Spirituality encompasses all the ways that we complete the connection with God. I find helpful that Gary Thomas calls spirituality, “Sacred Pathways,” in his book by that name.¹¹⁸ Just as God created great diversity among us, God has also created great diversities of sacred pathways that we can use to connect with God.

God’s Love: God’s Love is Limitless

As Jesus told Nicodemus, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send

¹¹⁷ Matthew 18:19 (NET).

¹¹⁸ Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*.

the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”¹¹⁹

God’s love for us is so great, he was willing to sacrifice his son for us, even though God knows us exactly as we are. As Paul reinforces, “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”¹²⁰ “While we still were sinners . . .” That is limitless love!

Our Love: We Love God with Our Whole Being and We Love Others as Ourselves

Luther believed that the end result of being in communion with God was living for others. He wrote . . .

The more a person inwardly contemplated the Son of God in the Gospel, the more he would outwardly fulfil the duties of his vocation . . . The hearing of God’s word and the reception of the Spirit through meditation on it, first led to ‘external works’ . . . The person who meditated produced its fruit by a life lived in service of his neighbor.¹²¹

Former teaching pastor and professor of Philosophy and Biblical Studies, Jared Byas, in *Love Matters More*, makes the case that it is our responsibility to discover through the Spirit new understandings of what the Bible is saying to us today. Jesus says, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”¹²² Byas points out that Jesus said it is the Spirit that will guide us to truth. Byas reminds us, “Notice what Jesus didn’t say, that the Bible would guide you into all truth; He said the Spirit would.”¹²³

¹¹⁹ John 3:16-17 (NRSV).

¹²⁰ Romans 5:8 (NRSV).

¹²¹ *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 6, *Genesis Chapters 31-37* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 32.

¹²² John 16:13 (NRSV).

¹²³ Jared Byas, *Love Matters More: How Fighting to be Right Keeps Us from Loving Like Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books, 2020), 125.

Do we trust the Spirit to teach us new things? Byas challenges us, “We must carry on the legacy of Jesus, Paul, Matthew, and all the Biblical writers by trusting the Spirit to guide us into new truths about God.”¹²⁴

Everyone reads the Bible with their own lens. It may be historically, denominationally, scholarly, theologically, personal experience as well as others’ lenses. Byas suggests it may be time to change our lens to love. He writes, “Perhaps love should change our minds and our beliefs. Perhaps love should change how we read the Bible . . . Matthew, Paul, and many of the other writers of the New Testament . . . we’re facing new situations and circumstances. They had to figure out how to make new meanings from old texts.”¹²⁵ Could the lens we use be compassion like Jesus extended compassion to all people?¹²⁶ Can we come to the same conclusion about our religion as the Dalai Lama did about his? “My religion is kindness.”¹²⁷

Our Love: Spirituality Centers on God

Spirituality is an attempt to live a life that is centered not on career, pleasure, money, possessions or notoriety, but on God and others. An early 20th century spiritual writer, Evelyn Underhill, describes a spiritual life like this: “A spiritual life is simply a life in which all that we do comes from the center, where we are anchored in God: a life soaked through and through by a sense of divine reality . . . and self-given to the great movement of God’s will.”¹²⁸

This spiritual connection with the Divine does not just happen. It requires our involvement, time, and effort. It requires our commitment to make the time to pray, reflect, and meditate, and listen on a regular, consistent basis. We are not going to just find the time or the

¹²⁴ Byas, *Love Matters More*, 125.

¹²⁵ Byas, *Love Matters More*, 123.

¹²⁶ Frank Rogers, *Compassion in Practice: The Way of Jesus* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2016), loc. 123, 200, 242, Kindle.

¹²⁷ Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 39.

silence to experience the sacred. We need to plan it, put it down on paper and then stick to the plan. As you start, carve out 15 minutes in the morning and 15 minutes in the evening. One of my mantra's to my congregation was aim for 7 days, but be satisfied with 4 or 5. When you get into that habit, go back to the planning board to expand your time for the Divine.

Our Love: We Live in God's Presence

When Jesus was 12, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem, as they did every year. When the festival was over Mary and Joseph headed home. They assumed that Jesus was with their group of travelers. After a day's journey they realized Jesus was not there. He was missing. They rushed back to Jerusalem and after three anxious days, they found Jesus in the Temple sitting among the teachers.¹²⁹ Mary and Joseph missed it as their son astonished the teachers with his questions and answers. They had thought that Jesus would adjust to their plans and their schedule. They gave no thought to adjusting their plans to Jesus. This story has profound implications for us. R. T Kendall says . . .

“This illustration from the life of Jesus shows how we can run ahead of God as a result of not focusing on His Son and adjusting to the sensitivity of the Spirit. We, like Mary and Joseph, may think the whole time that Jesus is with us, only to discover that Jesus [He] is hardly with us at all. Therefore we must learn to adjust to Jesus [Him] – and not expect Jesus [Him] to adjust to us.”¹³⁰

David Mains in his book, *The Sense of His Presence*, ask the question, “What would happen if Jesus came to your church this Sunday?”¹³¹ I'm sure we could have all sorts of answers. However, if we are people who are regularly experiencing the presence of God in worship, nothing would be different. Jesus wants to meet us every day in our prayers, reading the Bible, silence, reflection, contemplation, and service. Jesus wants to meet us every Sunday as we

¹²⁹ Luke 2:41-51, summarized.

¹³⁰ Kendall, *The Sensitivity of the Spirit*, 8.

¹³¹ David R. Mains, *The Sense of His Presence* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1988), 15.

gather with others to worship Jesus and as we come to his table to receive Jesus in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Our longings for God are also real. God is ready to meet those needs if we only will seek God. Listen to what God says in Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Isaiah 55:1-5 (The Message) . . .

Hey there! All who are thirsty, come to the water!
Are you penniless?
Come anyway—buy and eat!
Come, buy your drinks, buy wine and milk.
Buy without money—everything's free!
Why do you spend your money on junk food,
your hard-earned cash on cotton candy?
Listen to me, listen well: Eat only the best,
fill yourself with only the finest.
Pay attention, come close now,
listen carefully to my life-giving, life-nourishing words.
I'm making a lasting covenant commitment with you,
the same that I made with David: sure, solid, enduring love.
I set him up as a witness to the nations,
made him a prince and leader of the nations,
And now I'm doing it to you:
You'll summon nations you've never heard of,
and nations who've never heard of you
will come running to you
Because of me, your God,
because The Holy of Israel has honored you.

God is not talking about food. Food is a metaphor for God, God's presence, God's love, God's acceptance, God's grace – all the things that nourish us and give us life. The invitation is . . .

Come and receive the best! Come live in the presence of the Most Holy.

Keating says that "The Scriptural model of spirituality emphasizes developing union with God here and now and working in service with those in need."¹³² Intimacy with God is the greatest treasure of all. Joel Warne in *The Intimate Journey* says that "Intimacy with God is the treasure in the field that Jesus says is worth selling everything in order to purchase."¹³³

¹³² Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 8.

¹³³ Warne, *The Intimate Journey* 5.

We see this intimacy in the lives of some of the people in the Bible. The perfect example is Jesus. In John 10:30 (NRSV), Jesus said, “The father and I are one.” Jesus kept this union and intimacy with his heavenly Father current by regularly going off by himself or with his three closest disciples, Peter, James and John, to connect with his father in prayer.¹³⁴

Peter, James, and John in spite of all their faults were Jesus’ most intimate disciples and they rose to the occasion at critical moments. In response to Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter responded, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.”¹³⁵ John was the only disciple that stood at the cross of Jesus with the women.¹³⁶ Peter and John rushed to the tomb on the first Easter morning.¹³⁷ Peter preached on the first Pentecost.¹³⁸ James led the first council of Jerusalem.¹³⁹ Outside of the 12 disciples, Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus were the closest friends of Jesus. They loved Jesus and Jesus loved them. When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple for purification, it is obvious that Simeon and Prophetess Anna were both intimate with God and discerning of God.¹⁴⁰

In Genesis 3:8-13 (NRSV summarized), we are told that Adam and Eve walked naked with God in the garden of Eden. Some refer to this as the first prayer walk. Genesis 5:24 (NRSV), Enoch walked with God. In Genesis 6:9 (NRSV), Noah walked with God. God called Abraham and promised to bless him and that he would be a blessing to others.¹⁴¹ Abraham negotiated with God to save Sodom and Gomorrah.¹⁴² Deborah was a prophetess, judge and

¹³⁴ Mathew 24:23, 26:36-44; Mark 1:35, 6:46, 14:32-39; Luke 5:26, 6:12, 9:18, 9:29 (NRSV).

¹³⁵ Matthew 16:15-16; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20 (NRSV).

¹³⁶ John 19:25-27 (NRSV).

¹³⁷ John 20:1-9 (NRSV).

¹³⁸ Acts 2:14-40 (NRSV).

¹³⁹ Acts 15:13-21 (NRSV).

¹⁴⁰ Luke 2:22-38 (NRSV).

¹⁴¹ Genesis 12:1-9, summarized.

¹⁴² Genesis 18:23-33, summarized.

military advisor whom God spoke to and she passed on the information to Barak the military leader.¹⁴³

Hezekiah walked faithfully with God. He begged God to extend his life and God granted that prayer adding 15 years his life.¹⁴⁴ God told Joshua, “Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”¹⁴⁵

Just as these people of faith were intimate with God, so today we too can experience that intimacy with the divine. This intimacy with God helps us discover who we really are and how we are part of God’s story for our world. Rohr emphasizes this as he writes in *Everything Belongs* . . .

The gift that true contemplatives offer to themselves and society is that they know themselves as a part of a much larger Story, a much larger Self . . . true contemplatives are paradoxically risk-takers and reformers, precisely because they have no private agendas, job or securities to maintain. Their security and identity are founded in God . . . These people alone can move beyond self-interest and fear to do God’s necessary work . . . I believe we have no real access to who we really are except in God.¹⁴⁶

The goal of our spirituality is poetically summarized in the words of the song “Day by Day” from Godspell, . . .

To see God [thee] more clearly
Love God [thee] more dearly
Follow God [thee] more nearly
Day by Day by Day¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Judges 4, summarized.

¹⁴⁴ Isaiah 38:1-8 (NRSV).

¹⁴⁵ Joshua 1:9 (NRSV).

¹⁴⁶ Rohr, *Everything Belongs*, 24, 26.

¹⁴⁷ Stephen Lawrence Schwartz, “Day by Day,” Herald Square Music Co., 1971. These lyrics were adapted from an ancient prayer of Richard, Bishop of Chichester. The text of his prayer, as it's given by the Diocese of Chichester:

Thanks be to thee,
my Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits which
thou hast given me,
for all the pains and insults
which thou hast borne for me.
O most merciful Redeemer,

Those steps are progressive. As I learn to see God more clearly, I am empowered to see others more clearly and to love God more dearly. As I love God more dearly, I am empowered to love my neighbor more dearly and to follow God more nearly. As I follow God more nearly, I am empowered to serve my neighbor. Ultimately, our goal is learning to love with God's love, to be compassionate with God's compassion, to forgive with God's forgiveness, and serve with God's power.¹⁴⁸

An Episcopal rector shocked many Christians when on a national radio broadcast said, "If the Holy Spirit were totally withdrawn from the church today, 90% of the work of the church would go on as if nothing had happened."¹⁴⁹ What an indictment of the church!

Bruce Epperly in *Praying with Process Theology* gives us another way to think about spirituality: vision, promise and practice. He writes, "Our lives are guided by a vision of a loving, open and relational God. We are inspired by the promise that we can experience God. We commit ourselves to practices that help our experience with God, others and the world come alive."¹⁵⁰

Brother Lawrence, a French Carmelite monk of the 17th century, in *The Practice of the Presence of God*, says that we were made to live in God's presence and meditate on God day and night. That is our purpose and profession in life. To be in continual communion with God is the greatest experience in life.¹⁵¹ Lawrence instructs us . . .

Friend and Brother,
may I know thee more clearly,
love thee more dearly,
and follow thee more nearly. Amen.

¹⁴⁸ Gary Thomas, "Severe Gifts," in *Growing in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 116.

¹⁴⁹ Kendall, *The Sensitivity of the Spirit*, 7.

¹⁵⁰ Bruce Epperly, *Praying with Process Theology: Spiritual Practices for Personal and Planetary Healing* (Anoka, MN: River Lane Press, 2017), 11.

¹⁵¹ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God in Modern English*, trans. Marshall Davis, (Self-published, 2013), 41, Kindle.

“Please remember that I have recommended that you meditate often on God, day and night, during business and recreation. He is always near you and with you; do not leave him alone. You would consider it rude to ignore a friend who came to visit you. Then why neglect God? Do not forget him. Meditate on him often. Adore him continually. Live and die with him. This is the glorious vocation of a Christian.”¹⁵²

Intimacy requires a restlessness. You have to be dissatisfied with the way things are between you and God. It requires a desire for more, a hunger and thirst for more of God in your life. Joel Warne in *The Intimate Journey* puts it bluntly, “In the end we choose the things we want the most.”¹⁵³ Our definition of spirituality begins with the desire for more of God in our life. That desire needs to be put into action: carving out time to pray, reading the Bible, and spending time in silence meditating on God. Desire alone is not enough. Desire without action is useless! Far too often we kid ourselves into thinking we are living by faith, when in reality our decisions and lives are being driven by our individual longings and desires.¹⁵⁴

One Bright Light of Hope

One bright light of hope, especially in the ELCA, is the “Dwelling in the Word” spiritual practice developed approximately 20 years ago by Church Innovations Institute.¹⁵⁵ It is an adaptation of the Lectio Divina practice. The 2020 the synod council of the Central/Southern Illinois Synod of the ELCA asked all of its 124 congregations to always begin all meetings with Dwelling in the Word. At the 2021 synod assembly, this was reaffirmed.

Dwelling in the Word is a contemplative practice without being named as such. The biblical text is read three times and after each reading there is silence. Then each time one

¹⁵² Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, 42.

¹⁵³ Warne, *The Intimate Journey*, 11.

¹⁵⁴ Warne, *The Intimate Journey*, 11.

¹⁵⁵ “Church Innovations Institute partners with churches to innovate their capacities to be renewed in God’s mission. Together CI and churches set sail on a journey of discovery, leaning into the holy gust of the Spirit of God, discerning together what God is up to in the church, community and neighborhood.” Church Innovations Institute, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://www.churchinnovations.org>.

question is asked: What do you notice? What do you wonder? What is the Spirit nudging you to do? The third question requires doing active listening for the Holy Spirit to speak. Unfortunately, even in this practice there is little to no emphasis on quieting the mind, concentration, attentiveness, inwardness, receptivity, reflectivity, mindfulness, and contemplation. But it is a start. A good start!

A number of researchers across the world are conducting on-going studies (as of July 2021) that assessing the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Already some have found that those with more frequent daily spiritual experience had greater resilience and less hopelessness during this time of illness uncertainty.¹⁵⁶ In a U.S., sample of 127 adults, those with more frequent daily spiritual experiences also reported greater resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁵⁷

Marshall Davis sums up well the need for spirituality as a way to fulfill the spiritual desires of the people. He writes in *Experiencing God Directly: The Way of Christian Nonduality* . . .

“My life as a Christian pastor has convinced me that most religious people hunger for first-hand experience of the Divine. They are not very interested in religion with its doctrines, rituals, commandments and bureaucracies. They will not settle for church programs, self-help workshops or spiritual novelties . . . They may put up with organized religion and spiritual teachers, but only if they might lead to a genuine spiritual encounter.”¹⁵⁸

In this chapter, I have used the definition of spirituality and its four movements – desire, action, interaction and love - as an outline of the theological and biblical foundations for spirituality.

¹⁵⁶ Lynn G. Underwood and Kaitlyn M. Vagnini, “The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale: Practical applications, scoring, versions, and empirical relationships to stress-buffering and resiliency-related outcomes paper,” draft publication, July 23, 2021. Sent as an email attachment to the author. At the time it was not yet published.

¹⁵⁷ Anka Roberto et al., “Impact of Spirituality on Resilience and Coping during the COVID-19 Crisis: A Mixed-Method Approach Investigating the Impact on Women,” *Health Care for Women International* 41, no. 11–12 (2020): 1313–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07399332.2020.1832097>.

¹⁵⁸ Marshall Davis, *Experiencing God Directly: The Way of Christian Nonduality* (Self-published on Kindle, 2013), 1-2.

As we see God more clearly, love God more dearly, and follow God more nearly, we learn to love with God's love, to be compassionate with God's compassion, and to serve with God's power.

We briefly looked at one bright light of hope in the ELCA of the spiritual practice of *Dwelling in the Word*.

In chapter 3, I will describe my project and the various components as well as a general timeline for my work. I will introduce you to each of the participants as well as myself. I will I also provide a brief summary of each of the chapters in the resource book that I developed for this project.

Chapter 3: Project Overview

Nuts and Bolts of my Project and Information about the Participants

Chapter 3 will review the nuts and bolts of my project: *You Can Connect with God Starting Today: A Spirituality for the 21st Century*. In this chapter I will take you through some of my decision making and the timeline of actions. It includes pre-covid plans, covid changes, permissions sought and received, measurements tools, participants broken down by demographics, narrative about the group demographics, an overview of the book, *You Can Connect with God – Starting Today*, that I developed for my project, and notes on each participant.

Pre-Covid Plans

At my first Jan. Intensive (2020) at the Willamette University Campus of Claremont School of Theology, I decided to center my final practical ministry project and paper on spirituality. Upon completion of that intensive, I started gathering potential resources and began reading research on spirituality. From my personal experience I knew that there was a critical lack of teaching and demonstration of spiritual practices, so I decided to focus on developing a resource to address that problem. I wrote a first proposal and submitted it to the IRB, thinking I would begin working on the resource right away. That initial proposal anticipated two small groups including one in Jacksonville and one in Mt. Pulaski, field testing the material in in-person small groups and another ecumenical group field testing the material at a Roman Catholic retreat center in Springfield.

Covid Changes

Then Covid-19 struck and life changed. I made a shift in my plans and instead of working on my project at that time, I decided to instead concentrate on taking both a summer course and two courses in the fall, all on Zoom, including *Teaching Contemplative Practices*. Without Covid this class is only offered in-person, which would have prevented me from taking it. This class provided

extensive material as well as actually experiencing and teaching many of the practices included in *You Can Connect with God – Starting Today*. At that point, I was hoping that Covid-19 was a temporary inconvenience. I was still wanting to conduct an in-person small group, or two, and maybe even a retreat. After 3 classes and my second intensive (Jan. 2021) all on Zoom, I was comfortable enough to plan on doing a small group field study on Zoom for my project.

I then dedicated the next 2.5 months to writing a book, *You Can Connect with God Starting Today: A Spirituality for the 21st Century*, that can be a stand-alone or a small group study. It is about 200 pages that include an introduction, seven chapters, some closing thoughts and a leader's guide.. In the Introduction, I present a working definition of spirituality and explain that spirituality encompasses all the ways we complete the connection with God. It explains that God is still speaking today and we need to be listening. Spirituality involves multiple senses and includes the heart, mind, spirit and imagination. Spirituality incorporates all the faith habits we develop. The introduction clarifies that spirituality begins with God as God is always waiting to connect with us. So, we humbly complete the connection God is making with us. While spirituality assumes that God is always seeking to connect with us, it is up to us to develop a sensitivity to the Spirit. That is why I suggested that the goal of spirituality is . . .

To see God [thee] more clearly
Love God [thee] more dearly
Follow God [thee] more nearly
Day by Day by Day.

Book Chapters Summaries

The Introduction further lays out the results of a 2017 national survey by Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization specializing in research at the intersection of religion, values, and public life. It emphasizes that when it comes to spirituality one-size never fits all.

Chapter 1 deals with the spirituality of prayer and how we need to not only talk to God, but also listen carefully to what God has to say and then practice discernment on whether we heard and understood God correctly. I then introduce 12 types and examples of prayer from the ages and from today.

Chapter 2 addresses contemplative practices by explaining what contemplation is and introduces the tree of contemplative practices. It explains the difference between reflection, meditation and contemplation. This chapter presents 12 different contemplative prayers from Jewish, St. Ignatius, St. Patrick, Zen Buddhist, the African American churches, Episcopal, and Lutheran traditions, as well as meditations on the 23rd Psalm and the Lord's Prayer.

Chapter 3 deals with mystical spirituality and characteristics of mystics. It introduces examples of contemporary visions, praying with icons, holy wondering and the Body Prayer.

Chapter 4 takes a lighter turn that explores the intersect of prayer and play and some ways to have fun while you pray.

Chapter 5 Deals with communal spirituality practices such as worship, friendship, Dwelling in the Word, singing, servanthood and social activism. It also deals with the active spiritualities of generosity, letting go and holy nudges.

Chapter 6 is about movement spirituality such as walking a labyrinth, prayer walking, walking meditation and dance. It also deals with the arts as spiritualities including sacred writing, poetry, coloring, painting and woodworking.

Chapter 7 deals with mindfulness, grounding, centering prayer and compassion spiritual practices for others and for yourself.

In the Closing Thoughts, I review again the definition of spirituality, the importance of consistency, developing habits and making a plan.

At that point, I was still hoping to also do a Zoom ecumenical retreat. However, the retreat center abruptly closed due to financial losses during Covid. This closure eliminated the possibility of doing such a retreat. This meant all my efforts needed to be directed to one online Zoom small group for my field test of the material. This change did allow for full participation of two participants who live a long distance away and two others who live 65 miles roundtrip. With Zoom, distance does not matter. All of these individuals enriched the group.

I resubmitted my proposal to my advisor who suggested that I add a pre- and post- personal interview with each participant of the field test group. He also suggested that I read the book *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry* by Ruthellen Josselson.¹⁵⁹ Both ideas were good suggestions and I incorporated both into my proposal. This book, *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry*, assisted me in discovering both the ‘little q,’ the first question of the interview designed to prompt the participant to open up without feeling threatened, as well as the ‘big Q,’ which was designed to gather the most qualitative information. Both are keys to a good interview.¹⁶⁰ The pre- and post- interviews were extremely helpful in gaining qualitative information from each of the participants. Using personal interviews as part of my project required a resubmittal of my proposal to the IRB and they quickly gave their approval.

Permissions Sought and Received

During the time that I was writing, I reached out and secured the written permission of the Pastor at Faith Lutheran Church and the council presidents of St. John’s Lutheran Church and Zion Lutheran Church, allowing me to invite the members of those churches to participate in the small group field testing of *You Can Connect with God – Starting Today*. All of them readily agreed. Both the pastor of Faith and the council president of St. John’s also signed up and

¹⁵⁹ Ruthellen Josselson, *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry* (New York: Guilford Press, 2013).

¹⁶⁰ Both sets of questions can be found in Appendix F and G.

participated in the group. The pastor of Faith also agreed to allow us to use the church Zoom account.

I handed out an invitation sheet¹⁶¹ containing information about a Zoom six-week field testing of *You Can Connect with God - Starting Today*, as well as making a verbal announcement after worship at three churches: Faith Lutheran Church in Jacksonville, IL,¹⁶² St. John's Lutheran Church in Mt. Pulaski, IL,¹⁶³ and Zion Lutheran Church in Gillespie, IL.¹⁶⁴ I also personally invited the people who participate in the two Zoom calls that I co-share the leadership. Those calls are sponsored by Faith: a *Dwelling in the Word* group that meets each Monday at noon, usually looking at the Gospel lesson for the coming Sunday, and a book study group that meets on Tuesdays evenings. Both groups meet for one hour. In addition I personally invited a colleague/friend from Chicago, my former organist who retired with her husband to Lincoln, NE, and my best male friend in Springfield, IL, who was our lone Roman Catholic.

Fourteen people responded positively to the invitation:

Nine from Faith in Jacksonville, IL

Two from St. John's in Mt Pulaski, IL

Three friends (one from Springfield, IL, Chicago, IL, and Lincoln, NE).

No one responded from Zion in Gillespie.

Measurement Tools

One of my early struggles was deciding which proven measurement tool to select to use with the field test small group. I seriously considered four: Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES), Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE-12), Negative and Positive Affect

¹⁶¹ See a copy in Appendix C.

¹⁶² This is the congregation where my wife and I belong and we consider it to be our home church.

¹⁶³ This is the congregation where I am the part-time Coordinating Pastor.

¹⁶⁴ I preach and preside at communion twice a month at this congregation.

Scale (NAPAS-12) - 12-Item Version, and the Negative and Positive Affect Scale (NAPAS-10) - 10 Item Version.

I chose to use The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES)¹⁶⁵ by Lynn G. Underwood as my measurement tool to assess change in the spiritual lives of the participants in a six-week Zoom group study teaching various ways to practice spirituality. I chose this tool for six reasons:

1. It deals specifically with spiritual experiences.
2. It is easy for participants to use.
3. It is written in language that is easy to understand.
- 4 It is self-scoring.
5. The “DSES has evidenced good reliability across several studies with internal consistency estimates in the .90’s.”¹⁶⁶
6. It is widely accepted as an appropriate measurement tool for spirituality studies.

Although, “Originally developed for use in health studies, it [DSES] has been increasingly used more widely in the social sciences, for program evaluation, and for examining changes in spiritual experiences over time.”¹⁶⁷ The last part of that quote is exactly what I was looking for “changes in spiritual experience over time.”

The DSES was used with the written permission of the author, Lynn Underwood. The DSES is a 16-item questionnaire that assesses the frequency of daily spiritual experiences. It focuses on ordinary spiritual experiences. Underwood’s description of the DSES is that “It includes constructs such as awe, gratitude, mercy, sense of connection with the transcendent and compassionate love. It also includes measures of awareness of discernment/inspiration and a sense of deep inner peace.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ See Appendix E for a copy of the DSES.

¹⁶⁶ Lynn G. Underwood and Jeannie Teresi, “The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale: Development, theoretical description, reliability, exploratory factor analysis, and preliminary construct validity using health related data,” *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 24, no. 1, (2002): 22-33, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15324796abm2401_04.

¹⁶⁷ “Daily Spiritual Experience Scale,” May 1, 2021, <http://www.dsesc.org>.

¹⁶⁸ “Daily Spiritual Experience Scale,” <http://www.dsesc.org>.

It is widely used in research including over 400 published studies and cited in over 1,200 published papers.¹⁶⁹ The purpose of the DSES is not to compare individuals to each other, but rather to discover where individuals perceive that they have made spiritual growth. Most of the participants completed all three of the assessments, although a few did not.

Fifteen of the 16 items on the DSES are scored on a six-point scale:

Many times a day	6
Everyday	5
Most days	4
Some days	3
Once in a while	2
Never or almost never	1

Item 16, “In general, how close do you feel toward God?” is also scored on a six-point range, but using only four categories instead of six:

Not close	1
Somewhat close	3
Very close	5
As close as possible	6

Some of the participants found this confusing as the order is reversed. The first 15 are scored from many times a day to never; the 16th question is from not close to as close as possible. I could not find any explanation for that change, so I wrote to the author. Dr. Underwood who wrote back explaining, “That was an accidental effect due to the requirements of the General Social Survey, which dictated a number of parameters. Recent guidelines have both going from low to high, less frequent to more frequent.”¹⁷⁰ I interpret her email to mean that the only reason for the change in scoring of item 16 was a standard procedure, not the choice of the author. That standard procedure has now been changed.

¹⁶⁹ Lynn G. Underwood, *Using the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale in Research and Practice* (Chagrin Falls: Applelane Press, 2019). Preprint still in draft form.

¹⁷⁰ Lynn G. Underwood, email message to author, July 30, 2021.

Underwood and Vagnini in their most recent paper (July 23, 2021), *The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale: Practical applications, scoring, versions, and empirical relationships to stress-buffering and resiliency-related outcomes* explain . . .

The best way to score the whole DSES is using a mean score – adding all item scores up and dividing by 16. This is better than a total sum score for the following reasons: (1) using mean scores allows for examination of individual items or subgroups, (2) it can compensate for missing responses, as you can divide the total by the number of answered questions to get a mean score, and (3) mean scores also more easily allow comparison with other research that used a 6-item version or only 15 items.¹⁷¹

My sample size was 14 participants from three ELCA congregations, one United Church of Christ (UCC) congregation, and one Roman Catholic congregation.

Nine participants were from Faith in Jacksonville, IL
Two participants were from St. John's in Mt Pulaski, IL
And my three friends were from Springfield, IL, Chicago, IL, and Lincoln, NE.

Everyone who participated knew me to varying degrees ahead of time. So there was an existing comfort level.

Participants' Demographics

The group of 14 participants fell into the following demographics:

Gender

10 Females	70%
4 Males	28 %

Race

12 Caucasians	86%
2 African Americans	14%

Lay/Clergy

¹⁷¹ Lynn G. Underwood and Kaitlyn M. Vagnini, *The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale: Practical applications*.

12 Laity	86%
2 Clergy	14%

Educational Level

4 with Doctorates	28%
7 with Masters	50%
2 With Bachelors	14%
1 Non-disclosed	7%

Employment

10 Retired	70%
3 Working	21%
1 Unemployed	7%

Age Range: 42-82 (estimated)

40's 2	14%
50's 1	7%
60's 6	42%
70's 4	28%
80's 1	7%

Religious Affiliation

13 Lutheran	92%
1 Roman Catholic	7%

Current Residence

8 Jacksonville, IL	56%
2 Mt Pulaski, IL	14%
2 Springfield, IL	14%
1 Lincoln, NE	7%
1 Chicago, IL	7%

Marital Status

8 Married	56%
2 Single	14%
2 Divorced	14%
1 Widow	7%
1 Widower	7%

Zoom Group Members

Already participating in one or two of the Zoom Groups	9
Not currently participating in a Zoom Group with me	5

Narrative about Group Demographics

As one looks at these statistics, there are some items that quickly catch your attention . . .

92% were Lutheran
86% were Caucasian
86% were lay people
77 % had advanced degrees
77% were in their 60's, 70's, or 80's,
70% were retired,
70% were females,
63% were already participating in at least one other group that I led or co-led,
63% came from one congregation, and
56% were married.

It was not a balanced group at all. Some of the results were to be expected. I recruited primarily through 3 Lutheran congregations. Lutheran congregations are primarily made up of older females. Older people are often retired. Only 14% were African Americans, yet that is 12% *more* than the ELCA! The ELCA is considered the whitest major mainline denomination in the United States.¹⁷² So, I was pleased to have two African American participants. The 56% married exceeds the U.S. average of 48.2%.¹⁷³ This was a highly educated group as the educational level far surpassed the general public. According the United States Census Bureau, 13.1% of the US population have a master's, professional degree or doctorate¹⁷⁴ compared to 77% of my test group! I believe that impacted my findings in both positive and negative ways.

¹⁷² "The most and least racially diverse U.S. religious groups," Pew Research Center, July 27, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/>.

¹⁷³ "These states have the highest – and lowest – percentage of married people in the US," Mar. 7, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2019/03/07/marriage-us-states-highest-percentage-married-people/39043233/>.

¹⁷⁴ "Number of People With Master's and Doctoral Degrees Doubles Since 2000," United States Census Bureau, Feb. 21, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/02/number-of-people-with-masters-and-phd-degrees-double-since-2000.html>.

This small, nondiverse sample cannot produce quantitative results or universal conclusions, but it can contribute qualitative personal narratives of the 14 people who participated.

Information About Each Participant

Participant 1 is from Mt. Pulaski. She is a senior citizen who has moved often, as her first husband was in the military. Throughout her life, she has had a longing for something more and so she has dabbled in numerous denominations, theologies and spiritual practices. She was insistent that before she would marry her present husband, he had to join her church. She is very progressive politically, which is unusual in Mt. Pulaski. She has a very inquiring mind, she processes ideas by talking through them out loud, and often has some significant contributions to make to any group. She is retired and active in the church behind the scenes.

Participant 2 is also a senior citizen from Mt. Pulaski and he is married to Participant 1. He served in the military in Viet Nam. He was a chemistry major in college. He has worked on a ranch, was a plumber, and owned his own heating and air conditioning business. He sold his business and retired in the last few years. He is extremely well-read and knows more of the Bible than most Christians. He often sees a deeper meaning in the scripture than others do. Because of his science background, he has a very progressive theology. He embraces many facets of Process Theology, in spite of growing up in Baptist and independent Christian churches, which are much more conservative than he is. He has a hunger to learn more. He was originally hesitant to be part of this group, but quickly became comfortable and fully participated. He is president of the Mt. Pulaski church.

Participant 3 is a resident of Jacksonville and an active, adjunct English faculty member at two nearby colleges. She was recently divorced and is still bitter about that. She was raised a

Roman Catholic, although in recent years she became an Episcopalian. During covid she joined Faith Lutheran Church in Jacksonville. She continues to accept most of Roman Catholicism theology and has difficulty with the concept of free grace. It surprised me that an English major and professor would read things so literally and not understand the role imagination could play in spirituality. At times, she became fixated on unimportant details.

Participant 4 is a resident of Jacksonville and a retired political science professor at a nearby college. She co-leads the zoom book group with me. She is a non-elected leader of Faith Lutheran Church and a close confident of the Pastor. She is single. She is currently analyzing a survey of church members on possible future directions of the church. She has strong progressive religious and political views. She is very verbal. She also had a difficult time understanding the role imagination can play in spirituality.

Participant 5 is the pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, Jacksonville, IL. He has been there almost ten years. It is his second call. In both calls, he successfully followed a very popular and beloved pastor. He is energetic and creative. Daily he cycles or walks outside or both. He finds God most often in nature. He and his wife have five children and home school them. He has progressive views, but is hesitant to make potentially disruptive changes, even though they are needed. Almost everyone loves him which I believe is one of his unconscious goals. At times, he rushes in to implement a new idea without doing adequate prep work and failing to get buy-in from key players.

Participant 6 is my closest male friend and has been a resident of Springfield all of his life. He is retired from IT with a state agency. His passion for 20 plus years has been building Habitat for Humanity houses. In retirement, he went to work for Habitat as a construction manager for two years. He still helps with some Habitat builds, but in a more limited role.

Helping to care for his grandchildren is one of his top priorities. His wife died of lung cancer just a few years ago and we walked with them during her dying process. They were in our small group at my previous church for over 10 years. Although officially a Roman Catholic, he rejects many Catholic theological and cultural views. I have often told him that he is much more Lutheran than Catholic. For a long time they were searching for something more. He is quite comfortable worshipping with almost anyone. He has numerous interfaith friends. He is politically progressive, but practical. He wants politicians to get done what can be done, even if it means settling for less than ideal. He felt the class helped him to focus.

Participant 7 was the most hesitant person to join the group. We talked numerous times about whether she would fit in and be able to both contribute and benefit from of the class. She became comfortable fairly quickly and most weeks in between sessions she would email me some insight she had, or connection she has made through what she was practicing. She sings in the traditional choir at Faith, yet it makes her quite nervous that she might make a mistake. Her life experiences have led her to strive for perfection and always feels inadequate. She is currently unemployed and for the most part has given up trying to find a job. She is single. Singing is her primary spirituality.

Participant 8 was the oldest member of the group at age 82. She is a very young 82. She is active at Faith Lutheran Church and in the community. She is a widow. She is a prayer intercessor. She keeps a prayer list and spends 20 minutes every night praying for each item on the list. She works in her garden most mornings. She is a painter and that is an important part of her spirituality. With her permission, I used a copy of one of her paintings in *You Can Connect with God Starting Today*.¹⁷⁵ She named her painting: “A Lament.” It is a painting of her husband

¹⁷⁵ See Appendix H, Glen VanderKloot, *You Can Connect with God Starting Today* final D. Min. project, painting by Lucille Korous, 252.

walking a path toward the light. She explains that it is her husband walking away from life with her to the light which is his life with God in heaven. She is a retired chemist and like Participant 2, that leads her to progressive tendencies and biblical interpretations. She is most concerned about what humans are doing to the planet with throw-away plastic bottles.

Participant 9 is a wife and mother to two elementary school boys. They are active members of Faith. She is co-treasurer of the church. She works in her parent's seed company business and has been under a great deal of stress, as they are understaffed. As a result of that staffing situation, she has had to pick up additional responsibilities for the last six months. She has a law degree and uses it in the family business, especially in contracts and employment issues. Her husband, with family help, is in the process of building their dream home himself. They have sold their current house and must be out in Sept., which is causing her a great deal of anxiety. She tends to see things with a practical viewpoint.

Participant 10 is a member of Faith and a retired lawyer. His wife has a debilitating, progressive disease and is constantly in extreme pain. His life is currently shaped by both his wife's illness and his near death experience a few years ago. He had a massive heart attack and stopped breathing until the paramedics could revive him. During that time, he had a vision of peace and moving to the light. He no longer worries about the future, trusting that it is in God's hands. He was the most conservative member of the group.

Participant 11 is my friend and former organist who now lives in Lincoln, NE, with her husband in retirement. She and her husband hosted and led one of the small groups in our small group ministry at Faith in Springfield. I invited her to join this spirituality group as I thought she might be interested. She was and accepted the invitation right away. She even invited three of her

friends to come. Unfortunately all declined. She considers herself a spiritual person of faith, praying everyday using the ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication) pattern. She has struggled with depression and severe headaches throughout her life. Currently, she is in a good place.

Participant 12 is one of the African American participants. She is a member of Faith, an activist with the NAACP, serving as the Jacksonville, IL, chapter president, and a retired college professor. She is currently in the Synodical Authorized Ministry education program of our synod. She serves on our Synod Anti-Racism taskforce. Her husband is suffering from some kind of illness that requires them regularly to commute to Chicago for treatments. She brought a different perspective to the group that enhanced our understandings.

Participant 13 is the second African American group member. She has recently retired from the ELCA corporate headquarters in Chicago where she was the Director of Discipleship, Spiritual Practices, *Book of Faith*, and Spiritual Renewal. This retirement was not voluntary. She currently attends a UCC church near where she lives. She will be moving to the East Coast in Sept. to be near her niece and family. She has identified an ELCA congregation where she intends to join. In her retirement, she would like to work on police/community issues from a spiritual view point.

Participant 14 is a senior citizen who retired as a teacher and Math Coordinator from Springfield Illinois Public School system about nine years ago. She resides in Springfield. Daily she reads devotions to her 97-year-old mother who resides in an assisted living facility in West Allis, Wisconsin. She is a member of the Faith Singers at Faith Lutheran Church. This group helps lead the music portion of the worship each week. She weekly writes and posts devotions on her church's Facebook page. She has been an active member of a Lutheran church all of her life.

For most of her adult life, she has been active in the music ministry of the church. She has been married for 50 years to the leader/researcher/writer of this project/paper.

The leader of the group is the writer/researcher. He was ordained as an American Lutheran Church Pastor (ALC), now part of the ELCA, in 1974 upon completion of his M. Div. degree from Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and a call to serve Immanuel Lutheran Church in Marseilles, IL. He has served full time four churches, Immanuel, Golgotha in Chicago, St. John's in Royal, and Faith in Springfield, all in Illinois. He retired in July 2015. He currently serves as the part-time Coordinating Pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church in Mt. Pulaski, IL. He also preaches and presides at communion once or twice a month at Zion Lutheran Church in Gillespie, IL and regularly preaches at Faith Lutheran in Jacksonville when the pastor is out of town. He plans on completing his D. Min. degree at CST in May 2022. He and participant 14 have been married for 50 years and reside in Springfield, IL. They have three children, and three grandchildren. He is a member of Faith Lutheran Church in Jacksonville, IL.

Ten of the participants attended all six 1.5-hour sessions, two attended five sessions and two attended four sessions. Two of the participants are ordained ELCA pastors and one is completing the Synodical Authorized Ministry program for lay people. It was a pleasure to work with each of the participants.

Chapter 3 gave an overview of the nuts and bolts of my project. It described pre-covid plans and how they changed because of covid. It recounted the permissions sought and received, the measurement tools and how I chose to use the DSES, recruitment of participants, participants broken down by demographics, a summary of the group demographics and brief notes on each individual participant.

Chapter 4 is about results. I will answer all of the following questions. What does the data show? Did people grow in their practice of spirituality or not? If there is growth, is it significant? Were there any breakthroughs? Did anyone have a life changing experience? Did anyone drop out? Did anyone decline in their spirituality?

Chapter 4

Findings and Results

Chapter 4 includes a summary of what the DSES showed regarding the growth or non-growth of spiritual experiences among the 14 participants over a six-week period. Because of the small size of this group and the lack of diversity, it is impossible to draw any quantitative universal conclusions. The quantitative data is accurate for these 14 individuals. However, in addition, there is also qualitative results from the pre- and post-interviews as well as some personal testimonies. These narratives can be very instructive of how people sense the changes in their spiritual practices and lives. I will show both progress and regression.

Background

Participants filled out the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale three times: pre-class, midpoint, and post-class. One person did not fill out the middle scale and one did not complete the final scale. Everyone else completed all three assessments. The assessment includes 16 statements that are self-scored by the individual on a scale from 1 to 6.

Lynn Underwood, the creator of the DSES, reminds scorers of the DSES that this is a personal inventory, not a tool to compare one participant with another. She further instructs that when you score the scale, the ‘mean’ is the most important number. That collective number of all 16 statements gives a better description of what has happened, as opposed to looking at individual items on the assessment tool. It also allows for a participant to skip a question, and some did. You adjust for that by dividing the raw numbers by 15 instead of 16.¹⁷⁶ You will find a chart of the DSES results on the next page.

Results of the DSES: Quantitative Data

¹⁷⁶ Lynn G. Underwood, email message to author, Sept. 1, 2021.

Participants	Pre-class	Mean	Mid-class	Mean	Difference	Post-Class	Mean	Difference From Mid-Point	Difference From Beginning
1	77	4.81	74	4.63	-.18 -4%	79	4.94	.31	.12 3%
2	51	3.19	53	3.3	.13 4%	58	3.64	.33	.44 15%
3	66	4.13	63	3.94	-.18 -5%	*	*	*	*
4	61	3.81	61	3.8	0.00 0%	67	4.19	.38	.38 10%
5	58	3.63	*	*	*	83	5.19	*	1.56 43%
6	45	2.81	48	3.20	.39 14%	52	3.47	.27	.65 15%
7	50	3.12	57	3.80	.68 14%	64	4.00	.20	.68 28%
8	66	4.13	73	4.56	.43 11%	59	3.69	-.87	-.44 -11%
9	44	2.93	49	3.26	.33 11%	54	3.6	.12	.67 22%
10	73	4.50	65	4.06	-.44 -10%	76	4.75	.69	.25 4%
11	72	4.50	88	5.50	1.0 22%	91	5.69	.19	1.19 26%
12	71	4.43	72	4.50	.07 1%	78	4.87	.37	.4375 10%
13	57	3.56	65	4.06	.50 14%	80	5.00	.94	1.44 40%
14	54	3.44	64	4.00	.56 16%	77	4.81	.81	1.37 43%
Total Mean	845 60.35	52.99 3.78	832 64.0	52.61 4.05	7%	918 70.61	57.84 4.45		18%

- Did not complete

Twelve of the fourteen participants experienced growth in their frequency of positive daily spiritual experiences. The range of growth in their mean score was 3% to 43%. That appears to be a large spectrum. The DSES positive scores clustered into three groups: 3-15%, 18-28%, 40-43%. Six clustered together in the 3% to 15% range. Three clustered in the 18%-28%, and three of the participants clustered together in the 40% to 43% increase in their mean number. The wide range of their growth indicates that people perceived their spiritual experiences at far ends of the scale. The mean score for the whole group grew from 3.78 to 4.05 to 4.45. This is an 18% increase in just six weeks. That was particularly encouraging. Lynn Underwood commented on these results, saying, “It seems that the intervention that you did, spoke to different people in different ways . . . and given the small sample size, you really cannot do any analysis of statistical significance.”¹⁷⁷

I found it very interesting that the participants that attained the largest percentage of growth (40% and 43%) were two clergy and one clergy spouse. I am unsure of the reason for this. Perhaps, spiritual leaders are more open to and want to work on expanding their spiritual capabilities. Lisa L. Rayburn in her Doctor of Ministry Project Paper at CST, *The Essence of Real Leadership: Truth, Wisdom, and Benevolent Consciousness*, notes in her conclusion that very fact, “The research findings of this project determined that it is not only possible to work with leaders on their spiritual condition and expand their capacity for spiritual embodiment and transcendence, but also that people desire this type of work and way of being.”¹⁷⁸

Dr. Lynn Underwood also suggested to me that it might be interesting to compare the starting base mean of the those whose scores declined with those who experienced the most

¹⁷⁷ Lynn G. Underwood, email message to author, Sept.15, 2021.

¹⁷⁸ Lisa L. Rayburn, “The Essence of Real Leadership: Truth, Wisdom, and Benevolent Consciousness” (Doctor of Ministry, Claremont School of Theology, 2018), 36.

growth. Both of the individuals who declined started with a base of 66 and ended with a 59 and 63 - a net drop of 7 and 3 points. The three who finished with the largest percent increase started at 54, 57 and 58. They finished at 77, 80, 83 – a net gain of 23 and 25 points. The participants who started with a high mean number had less room to grow. It is also true that those who started with a lower mean score had more room to grow.

One person did not complete the final scale, but on the mid-point assessment she had a decline of 4% from the pre-class assessment. She wrote on her mid-point DSES that . . . “I did not appreciate the singing.” During the class on the night that the assessments were later filled out, we did a small amount of singing. Since her comment did not relate specifically to any of the categories on the DSES, I wonder if that contributed to her decline. Two other people scored a decline in their mean numbers on the midpoint assessment, but turned it positive in the final assessment.

The person who had the largest decline surprised me greatly. She went from a mean of 4.13 to 4.56 to 3.69. She had a 11% gain at midpoint and then dropped 20% from there through the last class, for a net loss of 11% overall. This surprised me as she was one of the most enthusiastic participants, often volunteering to read or to share her experiences. From her demeanor in class, I never would have guessed that she was the person who would decline the most in her spiritual experience. Dr. Lynn Underwood reminded me that “There are going to be people that your intervention just did not “speak to”, and that is worth noting.”¹⁷⁹

Results of the Interviews and Comments: Qualitative Data

I interviewed all 14 participants before the class began and 13 participants after the final class session. The pre-interviews lasted 30-45 minutes and the final interview 45-60 minutes.

¹⁷⁹ Lynn G. Underwood, email message to author, Aug. 15, 2021.

Everyone participating spoke freely about their faith experiences. One person was activated during the fifth-class session and decided not to attend the final session, nor complete the final assessment and interview. The personal interviews reveal significant more about the individuals and how they have been changed through this process.

The initial interviews began with the ‘little q’ question: “How would you describe your spiritual life.” The answers were all over the place from ‘non-existent’ to ‘okay’ to ‘a moving feast’. Many added, ‘it could always be better’.

When I asked that same question in the final interview the answers tended to be fuller, more descriptive, and even poetic. One person said her spiritual life had become like “God’s garden: beauty everywhere when I open my eyes to see it.” Another, who initially described his spiritual life as “unable to make a spiritual connection,” after the study described his spiritual life as an ongoing “awakening.” Another said their spiritual life now “made them complete and able to transcend this world and connect with another world.” One participant initially described his spiritual life as “earthy and active.” In the second interview it changed to “active and contemplative.” Another responded to the question in the second interview with a contrast. He said, “He used to pray and then go and try to fix the situation himself. Now he prays and waits for an answer or direction.” Another said now she “is more peaceful and more aware of God’s answers.”

Since one of the project goals was to help people experience God’s presence, I asked them to tell me a time when they felt God’s presence. In the first round those answers varied from ‘not sure’ and ‘can’t think of anything’ to life changing moments such as death of a spouse, massive heart attack/cardiac arrest, cancer diagnosis, long hospitalization, living through the Viet Nam War, surviving auto crashes and losing a business. Others experienced God’s presence

during the everyday times of life: riding a bike, a full moon, lunch with friends, nudges of the Spirit, conversations, beauty of nature, and just spontaneously. It was thought provoking that only one person mentioned worship.

In the second round of interviews, many of the answers were more specific and not dependent on life changing events. One person said “I was a wreck. I could not sleep. I was overcome with anxiety. But finally I can sleep again. It is a miracle. Sleep meant God was present.” One of the men said, “Now I am seeing God at work in my life and in the world. I wake up in the morning and I feel God’s presence. I feel God present in everyday conversations.”

One of the participants said, “Now I finally understand the words of the hymn *I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry*. ”¹⁸⁰

I was there to hear your borning cry, I'll be there when you are old.
I rejoiced the day you were baptized, to see your life unfold.
I was there when you were but a child, with a faith to suit you well;
In a blaze of light you wandered off to find where demons dwell.

When you heard the wonder of the Word. I was there to cheer you on;
You were raised to praise the living Lord, to whom you now belong.
If you find someone to share your time and you join your hearts as one,
I'll be there to make your verses rhyme from dusk 'till rising sun.

In the middle ages of your life, not too old, no longer young,
I'll be there to guide you through the night, complete what I've begun.
When the evening gently closes in and you shut your weary eyes,
I'll be there as I have always been with just one more surprise.

I was there to hear your borning cry, I'll be there when you are old.
I rejoiced the day you were baptized, to see your life unfold.

¹⁸⁰ John Carl Ylvisaker, “I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry,” in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 732.

Another participant who lives alone said, “I feel joy and the silence is now welcome.” Another said, “Now, I believe God is close.” One participant whose mean number decreased on the DSES assessment said, “Now when old memories come to mind, I realize how blessed I have been throughout my life.” Still another said, “As I practice mindfulness, I feel connected with God.” No one mentioned worship in the second interview.

Every interviewee in the second round was able to identify spiritual practices they plan on continuing and those they might like to try at some time in the future.

One gentleman told me he did not feel like he grew very much through this experience. But he also said, “In the past, I have suddenly had a thought jump into my mind that I should call someone or go and visit them. Almost always I have followed through on those thoughts and discovered there was a need that I could address. Now I realize those were nudges from the Spirit.” My analysis is that he grew spiritually, without even recognizing it. I was able to follow up with him six months later at church and asked him, “What would spiritual growth look like for you?” He said, “Spiritual growth would conclude with a ‘A-ha’ moment where all the different pieces of the puzzle fit together.” I followed up with, “So are you saying spiritual growth cannot be incremental?” He thought for a while and then said, “No, it can be incremental but you only realize it afterwards.” Yet, he would not acknowledge that recognizing when God was speaking to him to do something, was a significant step of spiritual growth. He parses his words very carefully, which may be rooted in his jurisprudence degree.

All 13 participants who had a second interview indicated they would recommend this study to their friends and family members. The anecdotal evidence indicates that most of the participants experienced significant spiritual growth through this project.

Two of the participants, both members of Faith Lutheran Church in Jacksonville, IL, shared visions that they received from God. One was during a near death experience and the other after the death of her sister at age 12. They both remembered their vision in great detail, even though one of them happened 60 years ago. Both visions brought an overwhelming sense of peace, hope and assurance. Their visions changed their entire outlook on life to a sure and certain confidence that no matter what happened, it was going to be okay. This is a positive sign.

Joseph D. Driskill in *Protestant Spiritual Exercises: Theology History and Practice* identified that many mainline congregations are not safe places for conversations about spiritual experiences as one of the contributing factors for the lack of spirituality.¹⁸¹ It was obvious that these two participants sensed that Faith Lutheran, Jacksonville, was a safe place to share their visions, even though Lutherans do not regularly talk about such things.

Chapter 4 took a close look at both the quantitative and qualitative data regarding spiritual growth and experiences of the participants during this project. I examined in detail the growth or decline on daily spiritual experiences.

In chapter 5, I review the two goals presented in the Introduction and analyze the progress that was made in achieving these goals. I also suggest some possible ways that someone else could take this study to another level. I conclude this chapter with a few comments/-conclusions about the project.

¹⁸¹ Driskill, *Protestant Spiritual Exercises*, xii.

Chapter 5: Summary of Progress on the Goals, Possible Next Steps, and Conclusions

In chapter 5, we go back to the goals of this project as outlined in the Introduction and assess how well those goals were achieved. This chapter will share some possible next steps and conclusions.

The Primary Goal and Results

The primary goal of this project was to enable and empower others to regularly experience both the presence of God and intimacy with God as they recognize their desire to draw close to God, act on that desire using spiritual practices, and listen for and to the Spirit's nudges leading them to love and serve God and humanity. Did the project accomplish that goal? Yes and no. Fourteen people have been exposed to various kinds of spiritualities through a 200-page book, *You Can Connect with God – Starting Today*, and 6 ninety-minute class sessions. Each week participants had the opportunity to 'test drive' a few practices for themselves. Some of the participants have also identified their primary spirituality, and all shared how they have experienced God's presence. Thirteen indicated the spiritual practices they would continue to use on a regular basis. Some also identified some practices we discussed that they would like to try in the future.

The most pleasing result to me is that 12 of the 14 participants showed growth in their daily spiritual experiences as self-reported on the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale. This growth ranged from 3% to 43%. Six weeks is a short time to develop life-long spiritual habits. I have no way of knowing if they are continuing to use any of these practices on a regular basis. That could be something that someone else explores in a future study.

The Secondary Goal and Results

The secondary goal was to make available to pastors, deacons and leaders a resource they can use to teach spirituality to others. To meet this goal, I developed a book, *You Can Connect with God – Starting Today*, which the small group used for six weeks. I intend to pursue the possibilities of having this book published. Some of the participants indicated that the book is a valuable resource that they will keep and return to in the future.

Potential Next Steps

I think there are a number of possibilities for further research by others in this area:

1. Over the next year, each participant completes the DSES monthly to determine if the spiritual growth continues, grows, maintains or diminishes.
2. Complete a 10-week or 12-week field testing by going over the same material in greater depth and asking all participants to fill out the DSES weekly.
3. Adapt the material into a weekend retreat, use the DSES four times: before the retreat, halfway through the retreat, at the end of the retreat and six weeks later.
4. Since only one person indicated they experienced God's presence during worship, that seems like that is a ripe area for study.

A future goal is to develop an experiential confirmation program for youth based on spirituality to help youth discover ways to sense God's presence and experience intimacy with God.

Conclusions

This was a rewarding project. People responded positively. The qualitative narratives showed significant spiritual growth among the participants. As a group, the quantitative data from the DSES showed an average 18% growth. One of the participants had a decline of 5% and a second participant had a decline of 11%. Spirituality is a subject that congregations need to teach and discuss ways to help individuals experience God's presence and intimacy more frequently. God has given us sacred pathways. It is up to us to use them.

Appendix A: Frequency of meditation by religious groups % of adults who meditate

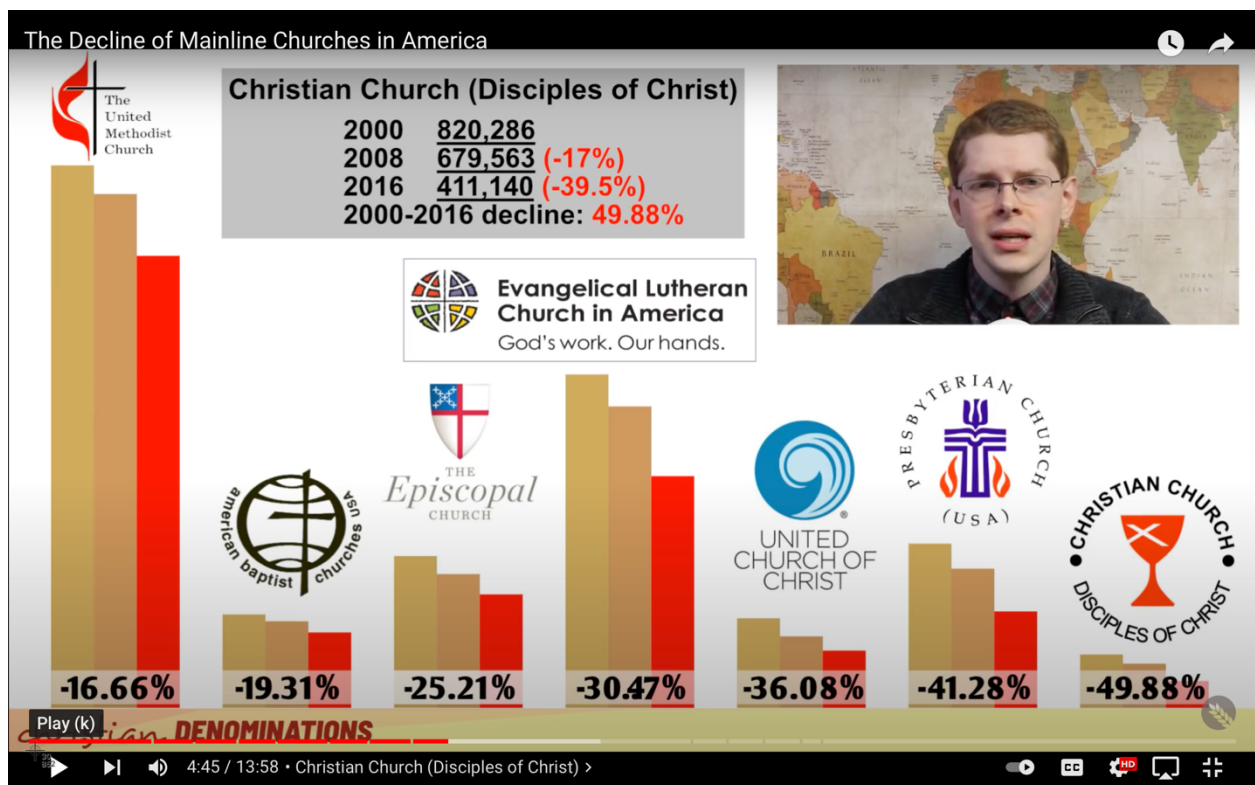
<u>Religious tradition</u>	At least once a week	Once or twice a month	Several times a year	Seldom/ never
Buddhist	66%	6%	7%	19%
Catholic	40%	9%	5%	45%
Evangelical Protestant	49%	7%	3%	40%
Hindu	33%	8%	7%	51%
Historically Black Protestant	55%	8%	4%	31%
Jehovah's Witness	77%	2%	2%	15%
Jewish	28%	8%	6%	56%
Mainline Protestant	36%	10%	5%	48%
Mormon	60%	10%	1%	28%
Muslim	35%	8%	7%	41%
Orthodox Christian	35%	5%	5%	53%
<u>Denominations</u>				
American Baptist Churches USA	43%	8%	3%	45%
Anglican Church	33%	12%	6%	48%
Episcopal Church	39%	13%	4%	43%
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)	32%	11%	4%	52%
Interdenominational (Mainline Trad.)	41%	10%	9%	39%
Presbyterian Church USA)	41%	9%	3%	46%
United Church of Christ	46%	9%	6%	37%
United Methodist Church	40%	10%	5%	44%

*** Pew Research 2014**

Appendix B: The Decline of the Mainline Churches in America from 2000 to 2016.

This graph shows the decline of what are often call the 7 sisters: The United Methodist Church, The American Baptist Church, The Episcopal Church, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, The United Church of Christ, The Presbyterian Church USA, and the Christian Church – Disciples of Christ.

Ready to Harvest. *The Decline of Mainline Churches in America* from 2000 to 2016. Feb. 26, 2019. Screen shot from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrcQNzr36KU>.



Appendix C: Invitation Flyer/Mailer

You Are Invited!

You are invited to join in a six-week small group study of Spirituality on ZOOM, led by Pastor Glen VanderKloot.

We will meet on Tuesdays, beginning on Apr. 13, 6:00 – 7:30 pm.

In this group study, you will learn and practice dozens of ways you can connect with God. We will be using the resource, *You Can Connect to God – Starting Today: Spirituality for the 21st Century*. The goal of this resource is to help each participant become more intimate with God through spiritual practices.

It is expected that you will read the appropriate chapter/s for each week. It is being developed by Pastor Glen as part of his final practical project and thesis of the Doctor of Ministry Program at Claremont School of Theology. This group will be open to anyone 18 or older. It is required that the material be field tested as part of the project. Your participation will be helpful to Pr. Glen.

This will not be a lecture. It will be experiential. I will introduce various spiritual exercises and walk you through them.

At no cost, you will be provided by email a digital copy of this book. This book contains an introduction and 7 chapters . . .

Chapter 1 Spirituality of Prayer
Chapter 2 Contemplative Practices
Chapter 3 Mystical Spirituality
Chapter 4 Prayerful and Playful
Chapter 5 Communal and Active Spirituality
Chapter 6 Movement and the Arts Spiritualities
Chapter 7 Grounding and Compassion Spiritualities

Since this book is still in draft form, you are asked not to share it with anyone before, during or after the study.

An internet connection is necessary, preferably with microphone and video.

All participants will be asked to do a 30-minute interview with Pr. Glen before and after the class on Zoom. A survey will need to be completed by each participant before the class begins, at the half way point and again at the end of the group study. This survey will take less than 10 minutes. Call or email pastor with questions or to register. We ask that if all possible, participants commit to attend each session.

Everyone needs to preregister by phone or email. Please do so no later than Mar. 30! The sooner the better. If you know of someone who might be interested, have them contact me.

To register or ask questions, call [REDACTED] or email Pr. Glen [REDACTED]

**Appendix D: Consent Letter
Claremont School of Theology
Letter of Informed Consent for
Participants Able to Give Legal Consent**

Identification of Investigator and Purpose of Study

You are invited to participate in a research study, entitled “Connecting to God.”

The study is being conducted by Glen VanderKloot, as partial fulfillment for the Doctor of Ministry program under the supervision of [REDACTED] of Claremont School of Theology, @ Willamette University 900 State St., Salem, OR, 97301. Email: [REDACTED] Phone: [REDACTED]

The purpose of this research study is to examine and experience various forms of spirituality to connect with God more comfortably.

Your participation in the study will contribute to a better understanding of the practice of Spirituality. You are free to contact the investigator using the information below to discuss the study:

Glen VanderKloot
[REDACTED]

If you agree to participate:

You must be at least 18 years old to participate

The small group will meet once a week for six/seven weeks for 90 minutes each session.

Your participation is intended to learn various ways to do spirituality.

You will be asked to complete an Everyday Spiritual Experience Scale three times over the course of the study: Before we start, midway and at the end.

You are also requested to participate in either a personal interview or a focus group twice: before the group starts and after the group meetings finish.

Your participation will consist in reading a chapter in preparation for each session, to explore the various types of spirituality each session, to learn by doing one or more spiritual practices in the group, practicing them in the week that follows and then share your experiences with the group.

You will not be compensated for your participation.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into practical theology, pastoral care and/or spiritual care. Participation in this study should not be regarded as or substituted for therapy by a licensed professional.

Risks and Confidentiality of Data

There are no known risks, other than possibly feeling uncomfortable as you try new spiritual practices.

There will be no costs for participating.

Your name, email address and other personally identifiable information will be kept during the data collection phase. No personally identifiable information will be publicly released. Your personal information, if collected, will be used solely for tracking purposes. Glen VanderKloot is the only one who will have access to your data. When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. If photographs, videos, or audio tape recordings of your participation are used for educational purposes, your identity will be protected or disguised. Your information will be stored only until the project is completed and then will be destroyed.

You gift permission for the results of this study to be published in the future.

Participation or Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary.

You may decline to answer any question and you have the right to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal will not affect your relationship with Claremont School of Theology or _____ Church in any way.

If you do not want to participate, you may simply stop participating.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the study or need to update your email address, contact the primary investigator:

Glen VanderKloot

[REDACTED]

or contact the advisor

Dr. Andrew Dreitcer of Claremont School of Theology, @ Willamette University 900 State St., Salem, OR, [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

This study has been reviewed by Claremont School of Theology Institutional Review Board and the study number is 2020-0501.

Questions about your rights as a research participant.

If you have questions about your rights or are dissatisfied at any time with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the chair of the Institutional Review Board by email at irb@cst.edu

Thank you.
Glen VanderKloot

I have read the information provided above. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date: _____

Address _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

Date: _____

A copy of this document will be supplied for your records.

Appendix E: Daily Spiritual Experience Scale

Table 1. Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (with item numbers added). Introduction: “The list that follows includes items you may or may not experience. Please consider how often you directly have this experience, and try to disregard whether you feel you should or should not have these experiences. A number of items use the word ‘God.’ If this word is not a comfortable one for you, please substitute another word that calls to mind the divine or holy for you.”

		Many times a day	Every day	Most days	Some days	Once in a while	Never or almost never
1*	I feel God’s presence.						
2	I experience a connection to all of life.						
3	During worship, or at other times when connecting with God, I feel joy which lifts me out of my daily concerns.						
4*	I find strength in my religion or spirituality.						
5*	I find comfort in my religion or spirituality.						
6*	I feel deep inner peace or harmony.						
7	I ask for God’s help in the midst of daily activities.						
8	I feel guided by God in the midst of daily activities.						
9*	I feel God’s love for me directly.						
10*	I feel God’s love for me through others.						
11*	I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation.						
12	I feel thankful for my blessings.						
13	I feel a selfless caring for others.						
14	I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong.						
15*	I desire to be closer to God or in union with the divine						
		Not close	Somewhat close	Very close	As close as possible		
16	In general, how close do you feel to God?						

© Lynn G. Underwood – contact author to register to use scale.
<http://www.dsescall.org/> or lynnunderwood@researchintegration.org

Appendix F: Pre-class Interview Questions

Thank you for participating in this zoom interview. I'm going to be taking some notes as well as recording this interview. Is that ok with you?

Thank you. Let me assure that there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. I am not looking for any particular answer. Tell it like it is. You will not offend or upset me with any answer you give. I will not judge you for anything you say. Your answers are confidential. If any question bothers you, just tell me you want to pass. That is okay. Just answer truthfully.

As you know, I am doing my Doctor of Ministry Final Project on the subject of Spirituality. So, most of our conversation will be about your relationship with God and how you feel about it.

How would you describe your spiritual life?

Tell me about a time you felt God's presence?

How satisfied are you with your relationship with God?

What would help you grow in your relationship with God?

What are the biggest hindrances to your spiritual life and why?

Appendix G: Post-Class Interview Questions

Thank you for participating in this zoom interview. I'm going to be taking some notes. Is that ok with you?

Let me assure that there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. I am not looking for any particular answer, though I may ask you to elaborate or further explain in order that I might more fully understand.

Tell it like it is. You will not offend or upset me with any answer you give. I will not judge you for anything you say. Your answers are confidential. If any question bothers you, just tell me you want to pass. That is okay. Just answer truthfully.

Don't answer what you think it should be, or hope it to be, but what is reality for you today.

As you know, I am doing my Doctor of Ministry Final Project on the subject of Spirituality. So, most of our conversation will be about your relationship with God and how you feel about it, and the course.

Question 1 How would you describe your spiritual life?

Question 2 Can you tell me about a time you felt God's presence during these last six weeks?

**Question 3 How satisfied are you with your relationship with God?
Scale of 1-5 with 1 being zero and 5 totally**

Question 4 How did you grow in your relationship with God during these last six weeks?

Question 5 What practices do you intend to continue? Why did you choose that one? How often and when will you use them?

Question 5b Any other practices you might try down the road?

Question 6 Would you recommend this course to a close friend or family? Why or why not?

Question 7 Is there anything you would like me to know?

Thank you for participating in the course and interview.

Appendix H

You Can Connect to God – Starting Today:

Spirituality for the 21st Century

(Not Available for Distribution)



182

Glen A. VanderKloot

¹⁸² Carol J. VanderKloot, *God is Still Speaking*, Mar. 21, 2022, word cloud.

Appendix I

You Can Connect to God – Starting Today:

Spirituality for the 21st Century

Bibliography for the Book: *You Can Connect with God – Starting Today*

“A Beginning Prayer and An Ending Prayer.” Brochure. Grace and Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, Richmond, VA.

Anglican Compass. “Are Icons Okay to Use in Prayer and Worship?” Aug. 9, 2017.
<https://anglicancompass.com/are-icons-okay-to-use-in-prayer-and-worship/>.

A Time to Laugh. “When the Voice of God Whispers.” Accessed Apr. 12, 2022.
<https://www.atimetolaugh.org/godwhispers.html>.

Argyle, Chelsea. *Christ Laughing Print*. Water color. ArgyleIllustration. Accessed Apr. 12, 2022. <https://www.etsy.com/listing/662789936/christ-laughing-print>.

Artress, Lauren. *Walking a Sacred Path*. 2nd ed. New York: Penguin Books, 2006.

Batterson, Mark. *Be a Circle Maker*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970.

Bays, Jan Chozen. *How to Train a Wild Elephant: And Other Adventures in Mindfulness*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc, 2001.

Berger, Fred. “Laughing Christ.” 1969. Charcoal drawing. Accessed Mar. 15, 2022.
<http://a-ministers-musings.blogspot.com/2015/09/human-to-human.html>.

Berkenkamp, Glenn. “Treat Yourself to a Gratitude Walk.” Gratefulness. Accessed Apr. 13, 2022. <https://gratefulness.org/resource/treat-yourself-to-an-immune-boosting-mood-elevating-gratitude-walk/>.

Billy Graham Library (blog). “In His Own Words – Billy Graham on Worship.” Mar. 7, 2014. Accessed Mar. 5, 2022. <https://billygrahamlibrary.org/in-his-own-words-worship/>.

Butler, Philip. *Black Transhuman Liberation Theology: Technology and Spirituality*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.

California Lutheran University Campus Ministry. “Praying with Icons.” Accessed Apr. 5, 2021.
<https://www.callutheran.edu/mission-identity/campus-ministry/worship/sabbath-hour/praying-icons.html>

Cascadia Living Wisdom. "The Body Prayer of Julian of Norwich." Accessed Apr. 12, 2022. <https://www.cascadialiveingwisdom.com/body-prayer-julian-of-norwich>.

Catholic Stand. "The Meaning of Mystical Contemplation." Accessed Apr. 29, 2020. <https://www.davidtorkington.com/the-meaning> Central Southern Illinois Synod – ELCA. "Dwelling in the Word." Accessed January 15, 2022. <https://www.csis-elca.org/synod-council-initiatives/#dwelling-of-mystical-contemplation/>.

Childre, Doc, and Howard Martin. *The Heart Math Solution: The Institute of Heart Math's Revolutionary Program for Engaging the Power of the Heart Intelligence*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999.

Church Innovations. "Dwelling in the Word: Listen Into Free Speech and Welcome the Stranger." Accessed April 12, 2022. <https://www.churchinnovations.org/Dwelling-in-the-Word>.

CMind: The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. "The Tree of Contemplative Practices." Illustration. 2014. <http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree>.

Come, Lord Jesus: Transformation Prayer Guide. Minneapolis, MN: Prayer Transformation Ministries.

Daugherty, Alane. *Unstressed: How Somatic Awareness Can Transform Your Body's Stress Response and Build Emotional Resilience*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2019.

Daughters of St. Paul. "How to Pray with Icons." Aug. 19, 2020. <http://www.pauline.org/Pauline-Books-Media-Blog/ArticleID/3336/How-to-Pray-With-Icons>.

Dreitcer, Andrew. *Living Compassion: Loving Like Jesus*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2017.

Driskill, Joseph D. *Protestant Spiritual Exercises: Theology, History and Practice*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999.

Duerr, Maia. "The Tree of Contemplative Practices." Apr. 1, 2019. Youtube webinar. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9W7pYOlqps>.

Duhigg, Charles. *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*. New York: Random House, 2012.

Episcopal Diocese of Newark. "Demonstration of Dwelling in the Word." YouTube. September 5, 2017. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6M2jFtbRsOk>.

———. "Dwelling in the Word." YouTube. May 3, 2016. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6T8OGy27kMk>.

———. “Dwelling in the Word Resources.” Accessed Apr. 11, 2022.
<https://dioceseofnewark.org/joining-god/dwelling-word>.

Edwards, Jonathan. “A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to be Both Scriptural and Rational Doctrine.” Sermon. 1774.
Accessed Apr. 20, 2022.
https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/edwards_light.html.

Edwards, Tilden. *Living in the Presence*. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995.

Ellison, Pat Taylor. “What exactly IS Dwelling in the Word?” Youtube. May 17, 2012. Video,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gh6SszV6JNE>.

Epperly, Bruce. *Praying with Process Theology: Spiritual Practices for Personal and Planetary Healing*. Anoka, MN: River Lane Press, 2017.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. “Future Directions – Dwelling in the Word.” Accessed July 9, 2021. https://www.elca.org/Future-Directions/The-Process/Dwelling?_ga=2.167348219.454162436.1650946130-1038929450.1650946130.

———. “STRIVE for Justice and Peace In All The Earth. Apr. 25, 2022.”
https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices/Living-Our-Baptismal-Covenant/Strive?_ga=2.163235964.1305813729.1643156860-601847890.1643156860.

Evangelical Lutheran Worship. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006.

Formosa, Brad. *I Like Giving*. Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2007.

Fortin, Jack. *The Centered Life*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006.

Fuller, Millard. *No More Shacks*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986.

Gaines, Ernest J. *A Lesson Before Dying*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Genia, Vicky. “The Spiritual Experience index: A measure of spiritual maturity.” *Journal of Religion and Health* 30, no. 4 (1991): 337-347.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258856589_The_Spiritual_Experience_Index_A_measure_of_spiritual_maturity.

———. “The Spiritual Experience Index: Revision and Reformulation.” *Review of Religious Research* 38, no. 4 (1997): 344-361. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3512195>.

Goban, Louise Sloan. “Directions and Artwork.” 2020, unpublished paper.

———. *Praying in Color*. 2020. Colored crayons.

- Gore, Bruce. *Deeply Rooted: Knowing Self, Growing in God*. Cover design. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2016.
- Grace Fellowship Church, Buckeye, AZ. *Dance Ministry for Girls*. 2021. Photograph. <https://graceinbuckeye.com/worship-dance-ministry/>.
- Grace Works. "Spiritual Friendship." Accessed Apr. 12, 2022. <https://graceworks.com.sg/what-is-spiritual-friendship/>.
- Graham, Billy. *The Journey: How to Live by Faith in an Uncertain World*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007.
- Graybeal, Lynda L., and Richard J. Foster. *Connect with God: A Spiritual Formation Guide*. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006.
- Green, Jackie, and Lauren Green-McAfee. "The Praying Example of Susanna Wesley." Faith Gateway. June 5, 2018. <https://www.faithgateway.com/praying-example-susanna-wesley/#.YVXpsS-cZqw>.
- Ignatian Spirituality. "The Daily Examen." Accessed Apr. 12, 2022. <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>.
- . "Examen Prayer Card." Accessed January 27, 2022. <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Examen-Prayer-Card.pdf>.
- . "What Is Ignatian Spirituality?" Accessed Apr. 12, 2022. <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/what-is-ignatian-spirituality/>.
- Hancock Health. "Searching for the Positive in Life? Take a Gratitude Walk." June 9, 2018. <https://www.hancockregionalhospital.org/2018/06/searching-for-the-positive-in-life-take-a-gratitude-walk/>.
- Hanh, Thich Nhat. *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1987.
- Harris, Randy, and Greg Taylor. *Daring Faith: Meeting Jesus in the Book of John*. Abilene, Texas: Leafwood Publishers, 2016.
- Hartley, Fred A. *Prayer on Fire*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006.
- Hazelwood, James. *Everyday Spirituality: Discover a Life of Hope, Peace and Meaning*. Self-published, 2019.
- Higley, Sandra. *A Year of Prayer Events for Your Church*. Terre Haute, IN: Prayer Shoppe Publishing, 2007.

- Ingram, Kristen Johnson. *Beyond Words: 15 Ways of Doing Prayer*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2004.
- John Murphy's Blog. "Boats Floating Downstream." Sept. 19, 2021.
<https://fatherjohnmurphy.blogspot.com/2021/09/boats-floating-downstream.html>.
- Johnson, Ben Campbell, and Andrew Dreitcer. *Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001.
- Jones, Karen. "Walking is Man's Best Medicine." LSU Ag Center, Sept. 1, 2020.
<https://www.lsuagcenter.com/profiles/kmjones/articles/page1598954663617>.
- Jones, Timothy. *Prayer's Apprentice: A Year with the Great Spiritual Mentors*. Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000.
- Jones, Tony. *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.
- Keating, Thomas. *Intimacy with God: An Introduction to Centering Prayer*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994.
- Kendall, R. T. *The Sensitivity of the Spirit: Learning to Stay in the Flow of God's Direction*. Meadville, PA: Charisma House, 2002.
- King, Larry. *Powerful Prayers*. Los Angeles, CA: Renaissance Books, 1998.
- Koester, James. "Praying with Icons." The Society of Saint John the Evangelist. February 6, 2013. <https://www.ssje.org/2013/02/26/praying-with-icons-br-james-koester/>.
- Kornfield, Jack. "Walking Meditation." Accessed Apr. 12, 2022.
<https://jackkornfield.com/walking-meditation-2/>.
- Korous, Lillian. *Lament*. 2020. Watercolor.
- Kosloski, Philip. "How to Pray with Icons: A Brief Guide." Aleteia. Sept. 12, 2018.
<https://aleteia.org/2018/09/12/how-to-pray-with-icons-a-brief-guide/>.
- Labyrinth Society. "Download A Labyrinth." Accessed Apr. 25, 2022.
<https://labyrinthociety.org/download-a-labyrinth>.
- Lancaster Mennonite Conference. "The Practice of Dwelling in the Word." Accessed Apr. 25, 2022. <https://lmcchurches.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/ORIENTATION.Dwelling-in-the-Word.pdf>.

- Larson, Christian D. *Your Forces and How to Use Them*. London: GlobalGreye, 2015. First published 1909.
- Learn Religions. "Practice Walking Meditation." Feb. 12, 2019.
www.learnreligions.com/practice-walking-meditation-p2-3182955.
- Lessons for Living. "One Step at a Time." 1999. Accessed Apr. 12, 2022.
<http://www.lessons4living.com/poem.htm>.
- Lieber, Elizabeth. *The Soul of Discernment: A Spiritual Practice for Communities and Institutions*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015.
- Linn, Dennis, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn. *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995.
- Living Well. "Grounding exercises." Accessed Apr. 12, 2022.
<https://www.livingwell.org.au/well-being/mental-health/grounding-exercises/>.
- Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1949.
- Luther, Martin. *A Simple Way to Pray*. Translated by Matthew C. Harrison. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2012.
- . *Luther's Small Catechism*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Pocket Edition, 2006.
- Lutheran Book of Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978.
- Lutheran Church of the Resurrection. "Labyrinth: A Quiet Place to Pray." Accessed Jan. 27, 2022. <https://www.lcrchurch.org/worship/labyrinth>.
- Macbeth, Sybil. *Praying in Color: Drawing a New Path to God*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2019.
- Manney, Jim. *A Simple Life Changing Prayer: Discovering the Power of St. Ignatius Loyola's Examen*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011.
- McCarthy, Daniel J. *He Emptied Himself*. 2009. Woodworking.
- McDowell, Robert. *Poetry as a Spiritual Practice*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008.
- Merton, Thomas. *Thoughts in Solitude*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1956. Quoted in Timothy Jones, *Prayers Apprentice*. Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000.
- Miller, Renee. *Strength for the Journey: A Guide to Spiritual Practice*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2011.

- Murphy, Timothy Charles. *Sustaining Hope in an Unjust World*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2019.
- Nouwen, Henri. "Writing to Save the Day – Apr. 27," in *Bread for the Journey*, 146, <https://fliphtml5.com/kfvvy/pica/basic>. Quoted in "Writing as Healing," Write Right Words, June 9, 2015. <https://www.writerightwords.com/tag/henri-t/>.
- Omartian, Stormie. *Just Enough LIGHT for the Step I'm On*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1999.
- Ortberg, John. *Soul Keeping*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.
- Perrin, David B. *Studying Christian Spirituality*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Petersen, Eugene. *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004.
- Pickard, Nathan. "Engaging Scripture Through Dwelling In the Word at the Newmarket Church of Christ." Doctor of Ministry. Abilene Christian University. 2011. https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1012&context=dmin_theses.
- Puddister, Matt. "Julian of Norwich: A Theologian for Our Time." *Anglican Journal* (May 2020). <https://www.anglicanjournal.com/julian-of-norwich-a-theologian-for-our-time/>.
- Ramsey, Dave. "Bible Verses about Community." Ramsey Solutions. Sept. 3, 2019. <https://www.daveramsey.com/blog/bible-verses-about-community>.
- Rinker, Rosalind. *Learning Conversational Prayer*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992.
- . *Prayer: Conversing with God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970.
- Rogers, Frank. "Grounding Tips and Techniques." Printed handout. Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, Fall 2020.
- . *Practicing Compassion*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2015.
- Rognlien, Bob. *Experiential Worship: Encountering God with Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2005.
- Rohr, Richard. *Dancing Standing Still: Healing the World from a Place of Prayer*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014.
- . *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2013.

- . *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 2009.
- “The Welcoming Prayer.” Praying from the Heart. Oct. 14, 2016. <http://www.prayingfromtheheart.org/?p=553>.
- Sager, Allan H. *Gospel-Centered Spirituality: An Introduction to Our Spiritual Journey*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1990.
- St. Mary’s Episcopal Church. “Contemplative Walking: An Underused Prayer Opportunity.” November 19, 2016. <http://www.saint-marys.org/articles/contemplative-walking-an-underused-prayer-opportunity>.
- Salvatierra, Alexia, and Peter Heitzel. *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church Service to the Word*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014.
- Schutte, Daniel L. “I The Lord Of Sea And Sky.” 1981. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006.
- Shereos, Wenda. *Sacred Play*. Wheaton, IL: Main Stay Church Resources, 1999.
- Schwartz, Stephen Lawrence. “Day by Day.” Herald Square Music Co., 1971.
- Spiritual Growth Guide. “Mystic Spirituality – 5 Signs that You Are a Mystic.” Aug. 10, 2017. <https://spiritualgrowthguide.com/mystic-spirituality>
- Staines, Bill. “All God’s Creatures Got a Place in the Choir.” Celtic Thunder, 1979. Lyrics on Demand, accessed April 20, 2022. <https://www.lyricsondemand.com/miscellaneouslyrics/childsongslyrics/allgodscreatureslyrics.html>
- Teykl, Terry. *Pray the Price: United Methodists United in Prayer*. Muncie, IN: Prayer Point Press, 1997.
- Thomas, Gary. *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul’s Path to God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.
- . “Severe Gifts.” In *Growing in Christ*, 111-121. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.
- Underhill, Evelyn. *The Spiritual Life*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1937. Quoted in Jack Fortin, *The Centered Life*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006.
- Underwood, Lynn G. “The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale: Overview and Results.” *Religions* 2, no. 4 (Jan. 12, 2011): 29-50. DOI:10.3390/rel2010029.

- Underwood, Lynn G., and Jeanne A Teresi. "The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale: Development, theoretical description, reliability, exploratory factor analysis, and preliminary construct validity using health related data." *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 24, no. 1 (Feb. 1, 2002): 22-33. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15324796ABM2401_04.
- US Catholic. "A Guide to Praying with an Icon." Sept. 6, 2017. <https://uscatholic.org/articles/201709/a-guide-to-praying-with-an-icon/>.
- VanderKloot, Carol J. *God is Still Speaking*. Mar. 21, 2022. Word cloud.
- VanderKloot, Glen. "I Wept." 2019. Unpublished poem.
- Walden, Rochelle. *Laughing Wine*. August 4, 2018. Oil on canvas. <https://fineartamerica.com/featured/laughing-wine-jesus-rochelle-walden.html>.
- Wallace, B. Allen. *Mind in the Balance: Meditation in Science, Buddhism, & Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Walsch, Neale Donald. *Conversations with God*. London: Hodder and Stoughton/Watkins Publishing, 2019.
- Wikstrom, Erik Walker. *Simply Pray: A Modern Spiritual Practice to Deepen Your Life*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 2005.
- Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. New Harper Collins Publishers, 1999.
- Williams, Rachelle. "5 Physical Health Benefits of Spirituality." Chopra. July 19, 2019. <https://chopra.com/articles/5-physical-health-benefits-of-spirituality>.
- Yaconelli, Mike. "Messy: The Workshop of the Spiritual Life." In *Growing in Christ*, 67-75. Grand Rapids, MI: Family Christian Stores, 2003.
- . "Messy Spirituality." In *Growing in Christ*, 77-91. Grand Rapids, MI: Family Christian Stores, 2003.
- Zscheile, Dwight J., "Dwelling in the Word: Affirming Its Promise." *Faculty Publications*. (2012). http://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/faculty_articles/184.

Appendix J

Connecting with God – Starting Today: Spirituality for the 21st Century Leader's Guide

Congratulations, you are about to lead a small group that can change and shape their spirituality and faith for life. Thank you for your willingness to invest part of your life in the lives of others for the next 6-8 weeks. This is simply a guide with some suggestions. You are free to make other choices of which practices you choose to do in depth.

Before you begin you will need to make some choices. I recommend that your group meet for 90 minutes. That will allow the group to be exposed to a number of practices each week. Your circumstances may mean 60 minutes is the maximum. Or, you may have the luxury of a two-hour class. Work with whatever you have.

You also need to decide on how many class sessions you will have. You have some flexibility, but I would suggest 6-8 weeks. There is a rather long introduction and then 7 chapters. I combined the introduction and chapter 1 into one session, and also combined chapters 3 and 4 into one session. I think perhaps doing the introduction as its own session, might be a better choice. It is up to you.

Please approach this opportunity drenched in prayer. Be comfortable with each of the practices you model and teach. “Practice” each practice you will model. You do not need to like every practice. No one does.

Your book group can meet in person or on Zoom. It will work either way.

Consider using the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale to measure growth. Be sure to get permission from the author, Lynn G. Underwood, the author and copyright holder of the DSES.

Ask all the participants to read the Introduction and Chapter 1 in preparation for the first class.

Week 1

Welcome all participants

Opening Prayer - Since we want to expose participants to various practices that can help them connect with God and to experience God, begin simply by having everyone complete the sentence “Today I am thankful for _____, with the name of just one person who is not a family member – no explanation, just a name.

“God, at this moment I am thankful for . . .

Use an **Ice Breaker: Getting to know you, getting to know all about you** – from the musical “The King and I.” Ask that each person say their name and then share just one word that comes to mind when you hear the word ‘prayer.’

Some guidelines – please put your phones on mute.

Opening question: What are your hopes for this study?

Have them open their books to the definition of Spirituality in bold on page 6.

Think of it as four verbs:

Desire. Act. Interact. Love.

On the bottom of page 7, Dante M Rivero summarizes the results of spirituality.

Ask: Which of those results is most important to you? Why?

Ask: What is the difference between knowing about God and knowing God?

I recommend that you present **the Jesus Creed, the Jesus Prayer and Breath prayers**. Have them practice each of these prayers in the group.

Jump over to pages 181-182.

Stress that we can develop good spiritual habits. Help them understand **cue – routine – reward**.

As time permits overview **A Prayer while Waiting, Classic Prayers, especially the Ventures Prayer**.

Ask them to personalize a scripture by inserting their name in the scripture – pages 55-57.

And then, to rewrite a scripture passage as a prayer – pages 57-58.

Page 13 Closing Prayer “God, at this moment I am thankful for . . . (some thing)”

Ask all to read chapter 2 for week 2. And to practice some of the prayers they looked at in this lesson.

Week 2

Welcome back. Hope you have had a good week.

We are going to start today with an ancient contemplative practice from St. Ignatius – **The Daily Examen**. Turn to pages 71-74. The Daily Examen was at the very heart of the Spiritual Exercises. One of the few rules Ignatius made regarding prayer for the Jesuits was that they do this spiritual practice twice a day – at noon and at the end of the day.

It is a simple but powerful practice. It asks you to examine your own life and answer 2 questions:

What are your most grateful for?

What are you least grateful for?

This practice forces us to acknowledge that everything is not good in our lives, no matter how much we pretend they are. It is a reality check.

Take a few minutes of silence to reflect on your life and then we will use invitational leadership (After each person goes, they invite another person.). The leader should start and share using this simple format without any explanations.

God, I am most grateful for . . .

God, I am least grateful for . . .

Does anyone have anything to briefly share from your experiences with any of the prayers from this past week?

How did personalizing a prayer and rewriting a bible passage as a prayer go?

Today we are diving into a deeper practice – contemplation. One of the key results of contemplation is fulfilling the Jesus creed.

Contemplation puts a high value on a personal experience of the Divine.

Contemplation can draw us in closer and help us become more intimate with God, ourselves, others and nature. Many who might consider themselves naturalists are also contemplatives because of sensing their oneness with God's creation.

Have them look at the Tree of Contemplative Practices, page 65. This was developed by the Center for the Contemplative Mind. This is just one example and is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather illustrative.

A significant part of contemplation is intentional silence, creating space for us to hear God.

We are going to experience some contemplative practices.

Then move to **I Place the Eternal Before Me Always**, pages 69-70.
This is a Jewish Practice based on Psalm 16:8.

It is to help us be aware of God's presence all day long.

Quiet yourself.

Breathe attentively.

Pray.

Be deliberate in your intention and commitment to your time of contemplation.

Picture a cross or a crucifix in your mind.

Get comfortable.

Take a few deep breathes. In and out, in and out.

Begin with saying together **A Prayer Before Your Begin Contemplation** pages 66-67.

Be intentional in doing this practice. Focus on the cross.

A Gospel song to keep in mind:

“At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the Light
And the burden of my heart rolled away, rolled away.”

I will start it - a few times to indicate the pacing.

We will bring this to a close shortly.

Simply sit in silence.

Take a slow deep breath. Exhale.

Again,

One more time.

Open your eyes.

What did you sense?

How did you feel?

Did you hear anything?

Did you sense God's nudge at all?

Would anyone like to share anything about your experience?

We are now going to do another practice. As the leader, you need to choose either of the two
Resting in the Loving Gaze practices.

Point out the four purposes of these **Resting in the Loving Gaze** practices and its three parts.

Begin the guidance on page 75.

Debrief the experience.

Depending on time, call attention to some of the following:

A Meditation on the 23rd Psalm page 81,

Page 84 **I am Grateful**,

Page 85 **Prayer for A New Earth**,

Page 88 **2 Contemplative practices from the Black church**,

For next week, read chapters **3 and 4**.

Make sure the participants understand that it is very important for them to use the practices that were introduced in this lesson. Next week we will ask:

What practices did you try this week?

How did they go?

Week 3

We will start today by learning/experiencing **the Body Prayer**. It is an easy prayer to learn. It can be found on pages 102-104.

This prayer ...

dates back to the 1300's,
is a movement prayer involving the body, mystical prayer, and contemplative prayer.

Some people can't sit still to pray, but find using movement to accompany their prayers is helpful.

Julian of Norwich developed it. A mystic, she survived black death, but was left with a great deal of body pain.

She is considered a prophet, theologian and author. Without question, she was a feminist before her time.

Two hundred years before Martin Luther went through his struggles of trying to please God, she went through the same struggles and discovered the same thing Luther did 200 years later – God is not an angry judge – but a loving parent. She called God, “loving mother.” She also said that God suffers with us in our sufferings which is something process theologians say today.

The body prayer is built around four literal movements that become prayer postures. The Body Prayer is seeking an awareness of God's presence, that you may or may not feel. By concentrating on four words to match the movements, it may or may not trigger in your mind thoughts from God. Be aware and be open.

Demonstrate the four postures.

1 Elbows at your side, hands out like you are waiting for God to come. The word you concentrate on is **await**.

2 You are lifting your hands in praise to God. The word is to **allow** – you are allowing God's presence to come or not, knowing that God's timing is not our timing.

3 You bring your hands to cover your heart. The word is **accept** – you are accepting heartfully any gift or word or vision or thought that God might bring. You accept you do not have all the answers. You are willing to accept that answers may or may not come.

4 Put your arms straight out, palms open and up in a flowing movement. You will **attend** to whatever God communicates or not – by reaching out in love to others for God.

Do each motion slowly and gracefully – not in a hurry – no erratic movements – but peaceful. For each movement, concentrate on that word and be open.

For those who are able – please stand.

Practice the prayer multiple times.

Be seated. Does anyone have some response or feelings about the Body Prayer?

What about this past week? What worked or did not work for you?

If you have access to some **Icons**, bring them to the group and explain that Icons are prayer aides. We do NOT pray to Icons, but through them.

Look at pages 101-102 for **Holy Wondering**. Mystics ask questions all the time. They wonder.

What are the things you wonder about?

When we do Dwelling in the Word, we ask 3 questions:

What do I notice? What do I wonder? How is the Spirit nudging you and/or us?

Naturalists experience God through nature. Ask if anyone would share a time they experienced God in nature.

Do the Body Prayer once again. This time use an adaptation from the chorus of *I the Lord of Sea and Sky* on pages 103-104. See how it fits?

What is your reaction to chapter 4?

The idea of chapter 4 is that prayer and spirituality can be simultaneously fun and serious.

If you have a picture of the Laughing Jesus bring it to show.

Look at the quote on the bottom of page 108 and top of 109. Ask them if they agree?

I do not see Jesus as a guy walking around with his hands folded. He enjoyed life. If he cried, which he did, is there any reason to think he did not laugh? I love the laughing Jesus.

Ask, Why have we have made Christianity so stuffy?

The disciples were diamonds in the rough. Don't you think they laughed when Jesus used illustrations like "a camel going through the eye of a needle"?

Turn to fun table prayers starting on page 114-115. Try each of these table prayers:

Johnny Appleseed, Adams Family, Zipadee do dah, and Thank You for the Food We Eat.

Close with the Body Prayer. Read chapter 5 for next week. And ask the participants to practice The Body Prayer, some of the table prayers and any other practice they would like to try during the week.

Week 4 You Can Connect with God

Welcome. After today there are only 2 sessions left. It is my hope and prayer that you are growing in your comfortableness with your spirituality. As in the words of Godspell, I hope you are growing in . . .

To see God [thee] more clearly
Love God [thee] more dearly
Follow God [thee] more nearly
Day by Day by Day¹⁸³

Use **Johnny Appleseed** as an opening prayer.

Today our topic is **Communal and Active Spirituality**.

What practice have you tried this last week that you both like and works for you?

Put it your tree on page 185.

What practice have you tried that does not work for you? (No details, just the names of the practices.)

What spiritual practices do you think might be better done communally?

Turn to **challenger/nudges** on pages 120-123.

People like challenges. Look at how popular some outlandish actions have become.

Encouraging spiritual challenges can be a spirituality. It is important to note that the challenger always needs to be ready to do the challenge themselves as well.

Has anyone here every been given a spiritual challenge? If so, what was it?

Have you ever given a spiritual challenge? If so, what was it?

What are some of the challenges given in the Bible? Who gave it?

To whom was it given?

(Some examples might be: Jesus to Peter to walk on water, Jesus to the disciples to follow me and feed the hungry, etc., Mary to Jesus, Joshua to the people of Israel – Choose this day.)

Who can you challenge to do what? Think very specifically?

No names – just category: relative, friend, church member, neighbor.

Turn to pages 123-124 - **Letting go**.

¹⁸³ Stephen Lawrence Schwartz, “Day by Day,” Herald Square Music Co., 1971. These lyrics are borrowed from Richard, Bishop of Chichester.

Raise your hand if you are good at letting go?

Why is letting go so hard?

Ask someone to read the Millard Fuller quote on the bottom of pages 123-124.

Have you ever experienced “a joyous abandonment about possessions” Anyone willing to share?

Look at page 124 for Mary Mrozowski’s “**The Welcoming Prayer.**” *Praying from the Heart.*

(Call on someone to read) How true is that for you?

Friendship – Look at the bottom of page 125 at the characteristics of a spiritual friendship.

Do you share relationships that have those characteristics?

Dwelling in the Word (pages 125-128) – read the scripture passage – silence – meditate – question.

What do you notice? What do you wonder about? What is the Holy Spirit nudging you/us to do?

Choose a scripture passage and lead this practice of Dwelling in the Word.

Worship is bidirectional. We communicate with God and God communicates with us.

Ask: How important is worship to you? Why?

What do you put in to worship?

What do you get out of worship?

What would make worship better for you?

Generosity, page 226. Ask those 3 questions.

Activist, pages 229-230 – Who has participated in some actions to change something in society? Share your experience.

Read chapter 5 for next week. Work on doing some of the practices.

Close with the Jesus prayer. We will repeat it three times with a pause in-between.

Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have compassion on me.

Ask the participants to read chapter 6 and practice Dwelling in the Word and at least one other practice.

Week 5

Welcome everyone. This is week 5. Only 1 more session after today.

How did Dwelling in the Word go? What other practice did you try? How did it go?

Today you do need to have pen and paper.

Begin with prayer. Today we will each pray: Lord, today I am thankful for (name someone who was influential in your faith life other than a parent) because . . . Then you can invite someone else to pray.

Who has ever walked a labyrinth. Where? What was your experience?

If your group is meeting in person, try to locate a labyrinth and walk it together. There is a labyrinth locator online.

Note the purpose of the labyrinth and the three movements on page 139.

Share: Some people slowly recite the Lord's Prayer, or the 23rd Psalm, or the Jesus Prayer or the Jesus Creed as they walk the labyrinth. Some name a problem and seek a solution.

When you get to the center, it is time for prayer and reflection. Many labyrinths have 6 petals in the center representing the six days of creation.

If it is not possible to walk a real labyrinth, use a virtual labyrinth. You can find numerous videos online with a simple google search. Choose one you think will work for your group.

Say this . . .

For this to be helpful you cannot just be an observer. You need to put yourself into the video and in your mind be walking the labyrinth. It needs to be done with intention to experience God, God's love, forgiveness, direction, or peace.

It is NOT the same, as if we could do this in person, but it may be the best we can do right now.

Get comfortable and be prepared to give it your full attention. Please try to avoid getting up and leaving during the video. Make sure you are on mute.

One sample video I have used is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-SBc-A3sK0>.

Always debrief the labyrinth experience, whether you are in person or online.

Think about what you felt, what you heard, and what you thought.

Take the group on a prayer walk (pages 237-240).

What do you notice for the first time?

What do you wonder?

What do you see?
Who or what did you see that you should pray for?

Where did you see beauty?
Where did you see God?

Sacred Writing

Take your pen and paper, take 10 minutes to write. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. Just write with a stream of consciousness. Responding to prompts . . .

Write: On your paper select one of the following:

Dear God, today I want to talk to you about...

Lord, I do not understand why...?

“Why am I here? . . .

Choose one – and start writing.

At the completion of the writing, ask for volunteers to share what they wrote.
Who is willing to read?

Poetry – does anyone write poetry?

Of the three poems in the book, which one spoke to you?

To which one did you identify?

Which one moved your emotions?

Closing prayer in a short form of a lament. How long, O Lord, will ...

Examples:

Noah might have prayed – How long, O Lord, is it going to rain?

Children of Israel in wilderness – How long O Lord till we get to the Promised Land?

Invitational leadership. Say your prayer “How Long O Lord...” and end it with the Jesus Prayer, “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God have compassion on me.”

Invite the next person . . .

Read chapter 7 and the Closing thoughts, next steps and bring something you can take some bites of – cookie, candy bar, energy bar. Practice 2 other practices this week.

Week 6 Connecting with God

Welcome

Opening Prayer – Jesus Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have compassion on me.

Our prayers always have to move beyond just ourselves.

After you pray for compassion for yourself, pray again.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have compassion on (Name someone who may need compassion.)

Then invite someone else to pray.

The Leader will go first.

I invite _____ to pray.

How did your practices go this week? Which ones are you going to make part of your daily routine.

Four subjects today: Mindfulness, Grounding, Centering and Compassion.

In an ideal world we would take an evening for each of these subjects.

We do need to move with intention. I want to do at least 3 practices with you.

Mindfulness

Turn to Page 163 for the **Serenity Prayer** – key in on just 2 lines:

Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time (circle)
That is a perfect description of mindfulness – Living in the moment.

Read the below. . .

Mindfulness is the antithetical of multitasking, which seems to be the American way. People think that Multitasking is the most efficient use of time, “But research has shown that our brains are not nearly as good at handling multiple tasks as we like to think they are. In fact, some researchers suggest that multitasking can actually reduce productivity by as much as 40%.” (verywellmind.com)

It is also life diminishing. Live one day at a time. Do one thing well at a time. Americans are too much in a hurry to do things – instead of living in the moment. A friend of mine, Elise, loves to visit Paris and Italy. She says they know how to eat. Dinner might take all evening as every sip of wine is savored, every bite of food is savored and conversation is enjoyed. Maybe we can learn from the French and the Italians.

Turn to pages 259-260 – One Bite at a time.

When you are eating, do you just eat or do you read, watch TV, make to-do lists, work on your computer? I am very guilty of all of those. I need to learn along with you.

Grab your food that you brought along. Pick it up, close your eyes and smell it. What does it smell like? Is it pleasant? Does it provoke some memory? Is that memory positive or negative?

Take a bite, put the item down. Feel the texture with your tongue and upper mouth – is it soft or hard, like pudding or more like an apple? Does it have skin or is it consistent texture?

Slowly chew it. Is it soft or crunchy? Finish chewing that bite.

Pick up the food and take a second bite. Put the food down. What does it taste like – is it sweet, or sharp? How would you describe the taste? Is it pleasing?

Do you like the taste? Have you always felt that way about it? Finish chewing that bite.

Pick up the food and take another bite. Put the food down. Are you noticing anything else? Does the taste trigger any memories? Savor that taste and savor that moment.

Grounding helps us remain calm and to refrain from giving in to the stresses of life.

Grounding is taking a timeout to sense the presence of the Divine, to calm down, take some deep breaths, and be at peace.

Shut your eyes.

Slow down. Take 4 or 5 deep slow breaths. Focus your attention fully on each breath.

Remind yourself who you are. Whisper your name. Whisper your age. Whisper where you are right now. Whisper two things you accomplished today. Whisper what you are going to do after this group is over tonight.

Remind yourself of whose you are. Whisper, “I am a baptized member of God’s family. God is my heavenly Father and Mother. Jesus is my savior and friend. The Spirit is my life guide.”

Slow down again. Take 4 or 5 deep slow breaths. Focus your attention fully on each breath.

Stretch your arms. Bend your elbows. Wiggle your feet. Wiggle your toes. Clap your hands. Notice the sound. Rub your hands together. Feel the sensation in your hands and arms.

Open your eyes. What five things can you see? What do you hear? What can you feel? Close your eyes again.

What emotions does your faith tradition give you?

What assurances does your faith tradition give you?

Who is your God?
Describe what your God is like?
What comfort does that give you?
What dis-ease does that give you? Can you let go of that dis-ease?

Compassion

Leader should read the first paragraph under compassion on pages 172-173.
I will lead you in a **Loving Kindness Meditation**.

Close your eyes. Take 5 deep breaths.

Repeat after me: May I be filled with loving kindness. pause
 What would that look like? pause

May I be well. pause
 What would that look like? pause

May I be peaceful. pause
 What would that look like? pause

May I be happy. pause
 What would that look like? pause

May I be kind. pause
 What would that look like? pause

Think of someone who causes you distress or negative emotions. Picture them in your mind.

Say after me.

May (person's name) be filled with loving kindness.
 What would that look like? Pause

May they be well.
 What would that look like? Pause

May they be peaceful.
 What would that look like? Pause

May they be happy.
 What would that look like? pause

Open your eyes.

Go to page 273. Look at the three questions that Helen asked of herself. Call on someone to read them.

Memorize those 3 questions and go back to them regularly when someone sets you off.

Debrief: How has this experience these past weeks been for you?
 What has been most helpful?
 How have you changed?
 How have you grown?
 What are you now going to do differently?

If you could tell the author of this study, what would it be.

You can send those comments to the author at pastor@faithlutheran.com.

Close with each participant completing the following.

Thank you Lord for introducing me to the practice _____ (name it) and help me to be faithful in using this practice.

Final Project Paper Bibliography

- Bliese, Stephanie. "1968: Strong Winds, Earthquakes, Fire, Gentle Whispers, and the Lutheran's Missed Opportunity." *Word & Wind* 38, no. 2 (Spring 2018):158-168.
- "The Body Prayer of Julian of Norwich." Cascadia Living Wisdom. Accessed Sept. 4, 2021. www.cascadialiveingwisdom.com/body-prayer-julian-of-norwich.
- The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Translated and edited by Theodore G Tappert. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959.
- Burge, Ryan P. (@ryanburge). "Mainline is a tradition that has declined rapidly over the last 40 years". Twitter, Aug. 17, 2019. <https://twitter.com/ryanburge/status/1162791535064358912>
- Burghardt, Walter J. "Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real." *Church* (Winter 1989). [www.alliesonthejourney.com › uploads › 7/4/7burghardt_-_contemplation_a_long_loving.pdf](http://www.alliesonthejourney.com/uploads/7/4/7/burghardt_-_contemplation_a_long_loving.pdf).
- Byas, Jared. *Love Matters More: How Fighting to be Right Keeps Us from Loving Like Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books, 2020.
- The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology: Guidelines for Congregations and Pastors: A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, Jan. 1972. <https://vdocuments.net/charismatic-movement-and-lutheran-theology-1972.html>.
- Chilton, Delmar. "The Miracle of Hearing." Living Lutheran Lectionary Blog. May 29, 2017. <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2017/05/lectionary-blog-miracle-hearing/>.
- Cymbala, Jim. *Fresh Power*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001.
- Damazio, Frank. *The Gate Church*. Portland, OR: City Bible Publishing, 2000.
- Davis, Marshall. *Biblical Nonduality*. Self-published, Kindle, 2021.
- . *Experiencing God Directly: The Way of Christian Nonduality*. Self-published, Kindle, 2013.
- Dietrich, Martin O., ed. *Luther's Works*. Vol. 42, *Devotional Writings I*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969.
- Driskill, Joseph D. *Protestant Spiritual Exercises: Theology, History and Practice*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999.
- Epperly, Bruce. *Praying with Process Theology: Spiritual Practices for Personal and Planetary Healing*. Anoka, MN: River Lane Press, 2017.

- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. "STRIVE for Justice and Peace In All The Earth." Apr. 25, 2022. https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices/Living-Our-Baptismal-Covenant/Strive?_ga=2.163235964.1305813729.1643156860-601847890.1643156860.
- Fortin, Jack. *The Centered Life*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2006.
- Gallup. "U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time." Accessed Mar. 2, 2021. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>
- Grady, J. Lee. "The Charismatic Movement: Dead or Alive?" Charisma Magazine. 2009. Accessed Apr. 25, 2022. <https://www.charismamag.com/blogs/fire-in-my-bones/5910-the-charismatic-movement-dead-or-alive>.
- Grier, Nicholas. *Care for the Mental and Spiritual Health of Black Men: Hope to Keep Going*. New York: Lexington Books, 2020.
- Henderson, Daniel. *Fresh Encounters*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004.
- Hillerbrand, Hans J., ed. *Luther's Works*. Vol. 52, *Sermons II*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974.
- Horan, Lisa, ed. "Connect Body, Mind and Spirit." Mindstream. Accessed Mar. 21, 2021. mindstreamconnect.com/blog/wondering-is-a-holy-practice/.
- Hunt, Tam. "Seeking the Divine: Spirituality in the Information Age." *Santa Barbara Independent*. Apr. 14, 2012. <https://www.independent.com/2012/04/14/seeking-divine/>.
- Johnson, Ben Campbell, and Andrew Dreitcer. *Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001.
- Jones, Timothy. *Prayer's Apprentice: A Year with the Great Spiritual Mentors*. Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000.
- Josselson, Ruthellen. *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry*. New York: Guilford Press, 2013.
- Keating, Thomas. *Intimacy with God*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2009.
- Kendall, R. T. *The Sensitivity of the Spirit: Learning to Stay in the Flow of God's Direction*. Meadville, PA: Charisma House, 2002.
- Kerr, Walter. *The Decline of Pleasure*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962. Quoted in Burghardt, "Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real." *Church* (Winter 1989): [www.alliesonthejourney.com › uploads › 7/4/7burghardt_-_contemplation_a_long_loving.pdf](http://www.alliesonthejourney.com/uploads/7/4/7/burghardt_-_contemplation_a_long_loving.pdf).

- Kleinig, John W. "The Kindled Heart: Luther on Meditation." *Lutheran Theological Journal* 20/2&3 (1986): 142-154.
- Lawrence, Brother. *The Practice of Presence in Modern English*. Translated by Marshall Davis. Kindle, 2013.
- Leiber, Jerry, and Mike Stoller. "Is That All There Is?" Peggie Lee. Capitol Studios, 1969.
- Lutheran Book of Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978.
- The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement: A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, April 1977. <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/9046DE2C-E03B-4508-B823-EEE0F007829C?>
- Mains, David R. *The Sense of His Presence*. Dallas TX: Word Publishing, 1988.
- Mattingly, Terry. "As 'Nones' Increase, Mainline Protestantism Is Headed For An Age Cliff." Religion Unplugged. Aug. 30, 2019. <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2019/8/30/as-nones-increase-mainline-protestantism-is-headed-for-an-age-cliff>.
- Ministry Matters. "How Is It With Your Soul?" Aug. 2, 2016. <https://www.ministrymatters.com/lead/entry/7571/how-is-it-with-your-soul>.
- Moberg, David O. "Spirituality Research: Measuring the Immeasurable?" *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62, no. 2 (June 2010).
- Movsesian, Mark. "The Devout and the Nones." First Things. Apr. 22, 2019. <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2019/04/the-devout-and-the-nones>.
- Murphy, Timothy Charles. *Sustaining Hope in an Unjust World*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2019.
- Nancarrow, Maggie. "The church is not dying. It's failing. There's a difference." Portfolio of Maggie Nancarrow. June 13, 2015. <https://www.maggienancarrow.com/2015/the-church-is-not-dying-its-failing-theres-a-difference/>.
- . "The church is not dying, part deux: Stories of Resurrection." Portfolio of Maggie Nancarrow. June 24, 2015. <http://www.maggienancarrow.com/2015/the-church-is-not-dying-part-deux-stories-of-resurrection/>.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav, ed. *Luther's Works*. Vol. 6, *Genesis Chapter 31-37*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955.
- . *Luther's Works*. Vol. 14, *Selected Psalms III*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960.

- . *Luther's Works*. Vol. 32, *Career of the Reformer II*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960.
- Peters, Nathaniel. "The Rise of the Nones." Public Discourse. Aug. 18, 2019. <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2019/08/53246/>.
- Petersen, Eugene. *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004.
- Pew Research. "Frequency of Meditation Among Religious Groups." 2014. Accessed Apr. 25, 2022. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/compare/frequency-of-meditation/by/religious-tradition/>.
- PRRI. "Searching for Spirituality in the U.S.: A New Look at the Spiritual but Not Religious." Nov. 6, 2017. www.prri.org/research/religiosity-and-spirituality-in-america/.
- Public Discourse. "The Rise of the Nones." Aug. 18, 2019. <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2019/08/53246/>.
- Rayburn, Lisa L. "The Essence of Real Leadership: Truth, Wisdom, and Benevolent Consciousness." Doctor of Ministry project, Claremont School of Theology, 2018.
- Ready to Harvest. "The Decline of Mainline Churches in America from 2000 to 2016." YouTube. Feb. 26, 2019. Video, 4:45, Screen shot from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrcQNzr36KU>.
- Redman, Matt. "The Heart of Worship." Thank You Music Ltd., 1999.
- Reese, Martha Grace. *Unbinding Your Heart: 40 Days of Prayer and Faith Sharing*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008.
- Religion Unplugged. "As 'Nones' Increase, Mainline Protestantism Is Headed For An Age Cliff." Aug. 30, 2019. <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2019/8/30/as-nones-increase-mainline-protestantism-is-headed-for-an-age-cliff>.
- Rivero, Dante M. "Christian Spirituality." Unpublished manuscript, February 16, 2017.
- Roberto, Anka, Alicia Sellon, Sabrina T Cherry, Josalin Hunter-Jones, and Heidi Winslow. "Impact of Spirituality on Resilience and Coping during the COVID-19 Crisis: A Mixed-Method Approach Investigating the Impact on Women." *Health Care for Women International* 41:11–12, (Oct. 2020): 1313–1334. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07399332.2020.1832097>.
- Rogers, Frank. *Compassion in Practice: The Way of Jesus*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2016.

- Rohr, Richard. *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2003.
- . *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009.
- . *Silent Compassion: Finding God in Contemplation*. Cincinnati: Franciscan Media, 2014.
- Schwartz, Stephen Lawrence. “Day by Day.” Herald Square Music Co., 1971.
- Shimron, Yonat. “More Churches Closing Than Opening.” Religion News Service. May 26, 2021. <https://religionnews.com/2021/05/26/study-more-churches-closing-than-opening/>.
- Telford, George. *Monday Morning*, June 1991. Quoted in Johnson and Dreitcer. *Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders*: 19.
- Teykl, Terry. *The Presence Based Church*. Muncie, IN: Prayer Point Press, 2003.
- Thomas, Gary. *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul’s Path to God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.
- Tozer, Aiden Wilson. *The Pursuit of God*. Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 1993.
- UCC. “We Listen for a Still-speaking God.” Accessed June 1, 2021. https://www.ucc.org/who-we-are/about/general-synod/general-synod-resolutions-regarding-environmental-justice/vitality/vitality_boost-your-vitality/vitality_what-matters/vitality_what-matters_we-listen-for-a/.
- Underwood, Lynn G. “The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale: Overview and Results.” *Religions* 2, no. 1 (Jan. 2011): 29-50. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel2010029>
- Underwood, Lynn G., and Jeanne A. Teresi. “The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale: Development, theoretical description, reliability, exploratory factor analysis, and preliminary construct validity using health related data.” *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 24, no. 1 (Feb. 1, 2002): 22-33. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15324796ABM2401_04
- Underwood, Lynn G., and Kaitlyn M. Vagnini, “The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale: Practical applications, scoring, versions, and empirical relationships to stress-buffering and resiliency-related outcomes paper.” Draft publication, July 23, 2021.
- United States Census Bureau. “Number of People With Master’s and Doctoral Degrees Doubles Since 2000.” Accessed Feb. 21, 2019. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/02/number-of-people-with-masters-and-phd-degrees-double-since-2000.html>.

Warne, Joel. *The Intimate Journey*. Plymouth, MN: Wellspring Life Resources, Inc, 2003.

Wiencke, Gustav K., ed. *Luther's Works*. Vol. 43, *Devotional Writings II*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968.

Wright, Almeda. *The Spiritual Lives of Young African Americans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Yaconelli, Mark. *Growing Souls: Experiments in Contemplative Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007.